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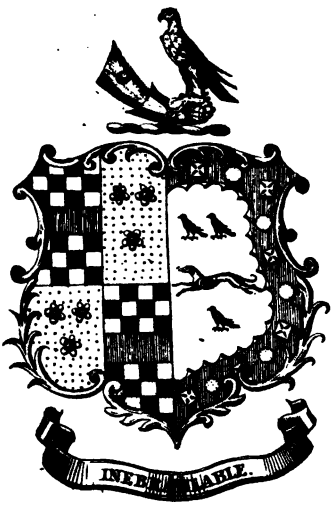

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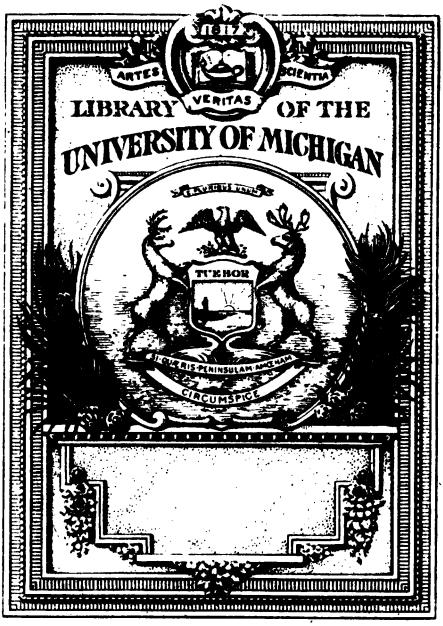
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Of the Most Reverend

Dr. JOHN TILLOTSON,

LATE

Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

IN TEN VOLUMES.

VOL. VI.

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SERMON CXVII.

Proving Jeſus to be the Meſſias.

MATTH. xi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Now when John had heard in priſon the works of Chriſt, he ſent two of his diſciples, and ſaid unto him, Art thou he that ſhould come, or do we look for another? Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto them; Go and ſhew John again thoſe things which ye do hear and ſee. The blind receive their ſight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raiſed up, and the poor have the goſpel preached to them: And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

ABOUT the time of our Saviour's appearing in the world, there was a general expectation of a great Prince, that ſhould come out of Judea, and govern all nations: this the Gentiles had from the prophecies of the Sibyls, which ſpake of a great King that was to appear in the world about that time. So Virgil tells us, that the time of Auguſtus was the utmoſt date of that prophecy;

Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas:

And Suetonius tells us, "That all over the eaſtern "countries, there was an ancient and conſtant tra- "dition, that ſuch a prince ſhould ſpring out of Ju- "dea:" And for this reaſon it is, that our Saviour is called by the Prophet, *the expectation of the nations.*

But more eſpecially among the Jews, there was at that time a more lively and particular expectation, grounded upon the predictions of their Prophets, of a Prince whom they called the *Meſſias*, or *the Anointed*; and thoſe who were more devout among them,

did at that time wait for his appearance; as it is said of Simeon, that *he waited for the consolation of Israel.* Hence it was, that when John the Baptist appeared in the quality of an extraordinary Prophet, *they sent from Jerusalem to enquire whether he were the Messias?* John i. 19. *The Jews sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ.* The Sanhedrim, to whom it belonged to judge who were the true Prophets, sent to know whether he was the Messias or not? he would not take this honour to himself, but told them the Messias was just at hand; and the next day, when Jesus came to be baptized of him, he bare record, *that he was the Son of God, and that he saw the Spirit descending and abiding upon him.*

So that it is plain that he knew him, and bare witness of him, which makes it the more strange that here in the text, he should send two of his disciples to enquire, whether he were the Messias or not? *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* that is, art thou the Messias or not? for so he is called in the ancient prophecies of him, ὁ ἐρχόμενος, he that should come. Gen. xlix. 10. *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, till Shiloh come.*

For the resolution of this difficulty, it is very probably said by interpreters, and I think there is no reason to doubt of it, that John the Baptist did not send this message for his own satisfaction, but to satisfy his disciples, who were never very willing to acknowledge Jesus for the Messias, because they thought he did shadow and cloud their master. From whence we may take notice, how mens judgments are apt to be perverted by faction and interest; and that good men are too prone to be swayed thereby; for such we suppose the disciples of John to have been; they will not believe their own master, when they apprehend him to speak against their interest; for they knew that they must rise and fall in their reputation and esteem, as their master did. They believed that their master was a Prophet, and came from God; yet for all that, they could not digest his

his teſtimony of Chriſt, becauſe that ſet him above their maſter; which they were ſagacious enough to perceive, that it tended to the diminution and leſſening of themſelves. And that this was the thing which troubled them, appears plainly from the complaint which they make to their maſter, John iii. 26. *The diſciples of John came to him and ſaid, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bareſt witneſs, behold the ſame baptizeth, and all men come to him.* This troubled them, to ſee him invade their maſter's office, and that he began to have more followers than John had; *he baptizeth, and all men come to him.*

This prejudice John had endeavoured to root out of their minds, by telling them, that he had always declared that he was not the Meſſias, ver. 28. *Yea yourſelves bear me witneſs, that I ſaid, I am not the Chriſt, but that I am ſent before him.* But when he perceived it ſtill to ſtick with them, and that they obſerved all his actions, and the miracles that he wrought, as if they had a mind to pick a quarrel with him, (for St. Luke, who relates the ſame ſtory, tells us, that when our Saviour had healed the Centurion's ſervant, and raiſed from the dead the widow's ſon at Nain, the diſciples of John ſhewed him all theſe things) I ſay, John Baptiſt perceiving that they watched him ſo narrowly, ſent two of his diſciples to him, that they might receive full ſatisfaction from him.

And St. Luke tells us, that upon their coming to him, he wrought many of his miracles before them, to convince them that he was the true Meſſias. Luke vii. 21, 22. *And in that ſame hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil ſpirits; and to many that were blind he gave ſight;* and then ſaid to the diſciples of John, *Go your way, and tell John what things ye have ſeen and heard; how that the blind ſee, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raiſed, and to the poor the goſpel is preached; and bleſſed is he that is not offended in me.*

So that you ſee that the reaſon why John Baptiſt

sent to our Saviour to know whether he was the Messias, was not to satisfy himself, for he had no doubt of it; but perceiving his disciples to be ill affected towards our Saviour, and hearing them speak with some envy of his miracles, he sent them to him, that by seeing what he did, and hearing what account he gave of himself, they might receive full satisfaction concerning him.

I have been the longer in the clearing of this, that men upon every appearance of contradiction in the evangelical history, may not be too forward to suspect the truth of it; but may be convinced, that if they would have but patience to examine things carefully, they would find that the story does sufficiently vindicate itself; and though it be penned with great simplicity, yet there is sufficient care taken to free it from being guilty of any contradiction to itself.

The occasion of the words being thus cleared, there are in them these two things considerable:

First, What it was that John the Baptist sent his disciples to be satisfied about; and that was, whether he was the Messias or not? *Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples.* The circumstance of his being in prison, seems to be mentioned, to intimate to us the reason why he did not come himself along with them; he sent two of his disciples to him, who said unto him, *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* And then,

Secondly, The answer which our Saviour returns to this message; *Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do see and hear; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them; and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

So that these words contain, *first*, the evidence which our Saviour gives of his being the true Messias. *Secondly*, An intimation, that notwithstanding all this evidence which he gave of himself, yet many would

would be offended at him, and reject him; *bleſſed is he whoſoever is not offended in me.*

Firſt, The evidence which our Saviour gives of his being the true Meſſias: And to prove this, there were but two things neceſſary:

1. To ſhew that he was ſent by God, and had a particular commiſſion from him.

2. That he was the very perſon of whom the Prophets foretold that he ſhould be the Meſſias.

The firſt of theſe he proves by the miracles which he wrought; and the ſecond by the correſpondency of the things he did, with what was foretold by the Prophets concerning the Meſſias; the prophecies concerning the Meſſias were accompliſhed in him.

Firſt, By the miracles which he wrought, *the blind receive their ſight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raiſed up.* Here is a brief enumeration of the ſeveral ſorts of miracles which our Saviour wrought, and theſe were a teſtimony to him that *he came from God*, and was ſent and commiſſioned by him to declare his will to the world. So he himſelf tells us, John v. 39. *I have a greater witneſs than that of John, for the works which the Father hath given me to finiſh, the ſame works that I do, bear witneſs of me that the Father hath ſent me.* Upon the evidence of theſe miracles, Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews, was convinced that he was ſent by God, John iii. 2. *We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do theſe miracles that thou doſt, except God be with him.* Nay his greateſt enemies were afraid of his miracles, knowing how proper an argument they are to convince men. John xi. 47. when the chief Prieſts and Phariſees were met together in council againſt him, they concluded, that if he were permitted to go on and work miracles, he would draw all men after him. *What do we?* (ſay they) *for this man doth many miracles; if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.* This they ſaid upon occaſion of the great miracle of raiſing Lazarus from the dead.

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the lame, and the leprous, and the deaf, he did in a miraculous manner, by a word or a touch, yea and many times at a great diſtance. But others were not only in the manner of their operation, but in the nature of the thing unqueſtionably miraculous, as giving of ſight to thoſe that had been born blind, and raiſing up the dead to life, as Lazarus, after he had lien in the grave four days: and himſelf afterwards, the third day after he had been buried; which, if there ever was or can be any unqueſtionable miracles in the world, ought certainly to be reputed ſuch. So that our bleſſed Saviour had all the atteſtation that miracles can give, that he came from God. And this is the firſt evidence of his being the Meſſias.

The Jews acknowledge that the Meſſias, when he comes, ſhall work great miracles; their own *Talmud* confeſſeth, that *Jeſus, the ſon of Joſeph and Mary, did work great miracles*; and the hiſtory of the goſpel does particularly relate more and greater miracles wrought by him, than by Moſes, and all the Prophets that had been ſince the world began; ſo that we may ſtill put the ſame queſtion to the Jews, which they did in our Saviour's time to one another; *when he cometh*, when the Meſſias whom ye expect comes, *will he do more miracles than theſe which this man hath done?*

But, *Secondly*, this will yet more clearly appear by the correſpondency of the things here mentioned, with what was foretold by the Prophets concerning the Meſſias.

Not to mention innumerable circumſtances of his birth, and life, and death, and reſurrection, and aſcenſion into heaven, together with the ſucceſs and prevalency of his doctrine in the world, all which are punctually foretold by ſome or other of the Prophets: I ſhall confine myſelf to the particulars here in the text.

Firſt, It was foretold of the Meſſias, that he ſhould work miraculous cures. Iſa. xxxv. 4, 5, 6. ſpeaking of the Meſſias, *he will come and ſave you; then the eyes of the blind ſhall be opened, and the ears of the deaf*

deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; this you see was fulfilled here in the text. It is true indeed, the text mentions another miracle which is not in the Prophet, that *he raised the dead*; but if God did more than he promised and foretold, this is no prejudice to the argument, if all that he foretold was accomplished in him. Besides, the Jews have a proverb, that God is not content to perform barely what he promiseth, but *he usually doth something over and above his promise*. That the Messias should *heal the blind*, and *the deaf*, and *the lame*, Isaiah prophesied; and God makes good this promise and prediction to the full; the Messias did not only do these, but, which is more and greater than any of these, *he raised the dead to life*.

Secondly, It was likewise foretold of the Messias, that *he should preach the gospel to the poor*, Isa. lxi. 1. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek*, εὐαγγελίζεσθαι πτωχοῖς. *to preach the gospel* or *good tidings to the poor*; so the LXX render the words; and they are the very words used by our Saviour here in the text. It is true indeed, this was no miracle, but it was the punctual accomplishment of a prophecy concerning the Messias, and consequently an evidence that he was the Messias. But besides, it had something in it which was very strange to the Jews, and very different from the way of their Doctors and Teachers; for the Rabbies among the Jews would scarce instruct any but for great reward; they would meddle with none but those that were able to requite their pains; the ordinary and poorer sort of people they had in great contempt, as appears by that slighting expression of them, John vii. 48, 49. *Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees believed on him? but this people who knoweth not the law are cursed*. And Grotius upon this text tells us, that the Jewish masters had this foolish and insolent proverb among them, that *the Spirit of God doth not rest but upon a rich man*, to which this prediction concerning the Messias was a direct contradiction: *The Spirit of the Lord*

Lord God is upon me, becauſe he hath anointed me to preach the goſpel to the poor. In old time the Prophets were eſpecially ſent to the Kings and Princes of the people: but this great Prophet comes *to preach the goſpel to the poor.* None have ſo little reaſon to be proud as the ſons of men, but never was any ſo humble as the Son of God; our Saviour's whole life and doctrine was a contradiction to the falſe opinions of the world; they thought the rich and great men of the world the only happy perſons, but he came *to preach glad tidings to the poor,* to bring good news to them whom the great doctors of the law deſpiſed, and ſet at nought: and therefore to confound their pride and folly, and to confute their falſe opinions of things, he begins that excellent ſermon of his with this ſaying, *Bleſſed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.*

Thirdly, It was foretold of the Meſſias, that the world ſhould be offended at him, Iſa. viii. 14. *He ſhall be for a ſtone of ſtumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houſes of Iſrael.* And Iſa. liii. 1, 2, 3. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? He hath no form nor comelineſs, and when we ſee him, there is no beauty that we ſhould deſire him; he is deſpiſed and rejected of men, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was deſpiſed, and we eſteemed him not;* and this likewiſe is intimated in the laſt words of the text, *and bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* Intimating, that notwithſtanding the great works that he did among them, which teſtified of him that he came from from God, notwithſtanding the predictions of their Prophets concerning the Meſſias were ſo clearly and punctually accompliſhed in him; yet notwithſtanding all this, they would take offence at him upon one account or other, and reject him and his doctrine; but even this, that they rejected him, and would not own him for their Meſſias, was another ſign and evidence that he was the true Meſſias foretold by the Prophets: For among other things this was expreſly predicted concerning him, that he ſhould be deſpiſed and rejected of men.

And

And thus I have done with the firſt thing I propounded to ſpeak to; namely, the evidence which our Saviour here gives of his being the true Meſſias.

Firſt, The many and great miracles which he wrought, prove that he came from God. And,

Secondly, The correſpondence of the things he did, with what was foretold by the Prophets concerning the Meſſias, declare him to be the true Meſſias.

I now proceed to the next thing I propounded to ſpeak to, namely,

Secondly, An intimation in the text, that notwithſtanding all the evidence Chriſt gave of himſelf, yet many would be offended at him, and reject him, and his doctrine. In ſpeaking to which, it will be very proper to conſider,

Firſt, How the poor came to be more diſpoſed to receive the goſpel, than others.

Secondly, What thoſe prejudices are which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion, at its firſt appearance, as alſo thoſe which men have at this day againſt the Chriſtian religion; and to endeavour to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them.

Thirdly, How happy a thing it is to eſcape and overcome the common prejudices which men have againſt religion.

Firſt, How the poor came to be more diſpoſed to receive the goſpel than others; *the poor have the goſpel preached unto them.* Which does not only ſignify that our Saviour did more eſpecially apply himſelf to them, but likewiſe that they were in a nearer diſpoſition to receive it, and did of all others give the moſt ready entertainment to his doctrine: And this our Saviour declares to us in the beginning of his ſermon upon the mount, when he pronounced the poor bleſſed upon this account, becauſe they were nearer to the kingdom of God than others; *Bleſſed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.* So likewiſe St. James, chap. ii. ver. 5. *Hath not God choſen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promiſed to them that love him?* So that it ſeems the poor were upon ſome account or other, in a nearer diſpoſition to receive the goſpel, than the great

great and rich men of this world. And of this there are three accounts to be given.

First, The poor had no earthly interest to engage them to reject our Saviour and his doctrine. The High-priests, and Scribes, and Pharisees among the Jews, they had a plain worldly interest which did engage them to oppose our Saviour and his doctrine; for if he were received for the Messias, and his doctrine embraced, they must of necessity lose their sway and authority among the people; and all that which rendred them so considerable, their pretended skill in the law, and in the traditions and observances of their fathers, together with their external shews of piety and devotion, would signify nothing, if our Saviour and his doctrine should take place. And there are very few so honest and sincere, as to be content for truth's sake, to part with their reputation and authority, and become less in the esteem of men than they were before. Few are so impartial as to quit those things which they have once laid great weight upon, and kept a great stir about, because this is to acknowledge that they were in an error, and mistaken in their zeal, which few have the ingenuity to own, though it be never so plain to others; and therefore it is no wonder that our Saviour's doctrine met with so much resistance from those, who were so much concerned in point of honour and reputation, to make head against it. And this account our Saviour himself gives us of their infidelity, John v. 44. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?* And chap. xii. 43. *For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

And besides the point of reputation, those that were rich, were concerned in point of interest, to oppose our Saviour and his doctrine; because he called upon men to *deny themselves, and to part with houses and lands, yea and life itself, for his sake, and the gospel's,* which must needs be a very hard and unpleasant doctrine to rich men, who had great estates, and set their hearts upon them. Upon this account it is that our Saviour pronounceth it so *hard for a*

rich

rich man to enter into the kingdom of God; and compares it with thoſe things that are more difficult, and humanly impoſſible; *I ſay unto you, it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

But now the poor were free from theſe incumbrances and temptations; they had nothing to loſe, and therefore our Saviour's doctrine went down more eaſily with them; becauſe it did not contradict their intereſt, as it did the intereſt of thoſe who had great eſtates and poſſeſſions.

Secondly, Another reaſon of this is, that thoſe that are poor, and enjoy little of the good things of this life, are willing to entertain good news of happineſs in another. Thoſe who are in a ſtate of preſent miſery and ſuffering, are glad to hear that it ſhall be well with them hereafter, and are willing to liſten to the good news of a future happineſs; and therefore our Saviour, when he had pronounced the *poor bleſſed*, Luke vi. 20. adds by way of oppoſition, ver. 24. *But wo unto you that are rich; for ye have received your conſolation.* They were in ſo comfortable a condition at preſent, that they were not much concerned what ſhould become of them hereafter; whereas all the comfort that poor men have, is the hopes of a better condition, *non ſi malè nunc, & olim ſic erit*, that *if it be bad now, it will not be always ſo*; and therefore no wonder if the promiſes and aſſurance of a future happineſs be very welcome to them.

Thirdly, If by the poor we do not only underſtand thoſe who were in a low and a mean condition as to the things of this world, but ſuch likewiſe as had a temper and diſpoſition of mind ſuitable to the poverty of their outward condition, which our Saviour calls *poverty of ſpirit*, by which he means meekneſs and humility; there is no doubt but that ſuch a frame and temper of ſpirit is a great diſpoſition to the receiving of truth. And that this is included in the notion of poverty, is very plain, both from the words of the prophecy I cited before, Iſa. lxi. 1. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, becauſe the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, and to bind up the*

broken-hearted; and likewiſe from our Saviour's deſcription of theſe perſons, in one of the Evangeliſts, Matth. v. 3. *Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit; for theirs is the kingdom of God.* So that by the poor who are ſo nearly diſpoſed to receive the goſpel, our Saviour intended thoſe, who, being in a poor and low condition in reſpect of outward things, were likewiſe meek and humble in their ſpirits. Now meekneſs and humility are great diſpoſitions to the entertaining of truth. Theſe graces and virtues do prepare the minds of men for learning and inſtruction; meekneſs and modeſty, and humility, are the proper diſpoſitions of a ſcholar. He that hath a mean opinion of himſelf is ready to learn of others; he who is not blinded by pride, or paſſion, is more apt to conſider things impartially, and to paſs a truer judgment upon them, than the proud and the paſſionate. Paſſion and pride are great obſtacles to the receiving of truth, and to our improvement in knowledge. Paſſion does not only darken the minds of men, but puts a falſe bias upon our judgments, which draws them off many times from truth, and ſways them that way to which our paſſion inclines them. A man of a calm and meek temper ſtands always indifferent for the receiving of truth, and holds the balance of his judgment even; but paſſion ſways and inclines it one way, and that commonly againſt truth and reaſon. So likewiſe pride is a great impediment to knowledge, and the very worſt quality that a learner can have; it obſtructs all the paſſages whereby knowledge ſhould enter into us, it makes men refuſe inſtruction, out of a conceit they need it not. Many men might have known more, had it not been for the vain opinion which they have entertained of the ſufficiency of their knowledge. This is true in all kinds of learning, but more eſpecially as to the knowledge of divine things. For God loves to communicate himſelf, and beſtow his grace and wiſdom upon meek and humble minds. So the ſcripture tells us, Pſal. xxv. 9. *The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his ways.* And 1 Pet. v. 5. *Be cloathed with humility; for*

for God reſiſteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

And thus I have ſhewn in what reſpects the poor were more diſpoſed for the receiving the goſpel than others. I now proceed to the

Second thing, namely, What thoſe prejudices and objections are which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion at their firſt appearance; as alſo to enquire into thoſe which men have at this day againſt the Chriſtian religion, and to ſhew the weakneſs and unreaſonableneſs of them. I begin,

Firſt, With thoſe prejudices which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion at their firſt appearance.

Both Jews and Gentiles were offended at him and his doctrine; but not both upon the ſame account. They both took exceptions at him, eſpecially at his low and ſuffering condition; but not both upon the ſame reaſon. I ſhall begin with the exceptions which the Jews took againſt our bleſſed Saviour and his religion; and I ſhall reduce them all, or at leaſt the moſt conſiderable of them, (as I find them diſperſed in the hiſtory of the goſpel, and in the Acts of the Apoſtles) to theſe ſix heads:

Firſt, The exceptions which they took againſt him upon account of his extraction and original.

Secondly, At the meanneſs of his condition, contrary to their univerſal expectation.

Thirdly, As to his miracles.

Fourthly, His converſation.

Fifthly, The prejudice that lay againſt him from the oppoſition that was made by perſons of greateſt knowledge and authority among them. And,

Laſtly, That the religion which he endeavoured to introduce, did aboliſh and ſuperſede their ancient religion, as of no longer uſe and continuance, though it was plain it was at firſt inſtituted by God.

Firſt, The exceptions which they took at his extraction and original. In relation to this they were offended at three things:

1. That his original was known among them. This you find urged againſt him, John vii. 27. *We*

know this man whence he is, but when the Meſſias comes, no man knoweth whence he is.

This to be ſure was no juſt exception in reaſon againſt him. For what if his extraction were known, might he not be from God for all that? They owned Moſes for the greateſt Prophet that ever was, and yet it was very well known from whence he was.

But they ſeem to refer to ſome prophecy of the Old Teſtament, which did ſeem to aſſert ſo much. If they meant that his extraction ſhould be altogether unknown; they knew very well and believed the contrary, that *he was to be of the line of David*, and *to come out of Bethlehem*. If they referred to that prophecy, that *a virgin ſhould conceive and bear a ſon*, and ſo underſtood that he ſhould be without father; this was really true, though they thought that he was the ſon of Joſeph. And if he affirmed that he had no father, he did ſufficiently juſtify it by his miracles; that being as eaſy to be believed poſſible by a divine power, as the miracles which he wrought; which yet they could not deny, becauſe they ſaw them.

2. Another prejudice againſt his extraction was the meanneſs of his parents and breeding. This you find mentioned, Matth. xiii. 54, 55. *Whence hath this man this wiſdom, and theſe mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's ſon? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren James and Joſes, and Simon and Judas? and his ſiſters are they not all with us? whence then hath this man theſe things? and they were offended at him.* And ſo likewiſe John vii. 15. *How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?*

A ſtrange prejudice and moſt unreaſonable! They could not believe him to be an extraordinary perſon, becauſe his parents and relations, his birth and breeding were ſo mean. He had been brought up to a trade, and not brought up to learning: whereas in reaſon, this ought to have been an argument juſt the other way; that he was an extraordinary perſon, and divinely aſſiſted, who all on the ſudden, without the help and aſſiſtance of education, gave ſuch evidence of his great wiſdom and knowledge,

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and did ſuch mighty works. This could not be imputed to his breeding, for that was mean; therefore there muſt be ſomething extraordinary and divine in it. Thus another man who had been free from prejudice, would have reaſoned.

3. The moſt unreaſonable prejudice of all, in reſpect of his extraction, was grounded upon a ſpiteful and malicious proverb, concerning the country where our Saviour was brought up, and they ſuppoſed him to be born; and that was Galilee, John i. 46. *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* and John vii. 41. *Shall the Meſſias come out of Galilee?* and v. 52. *Search and look, for out of Galilee ariſeth no Prophet.*

But it ſeems Nathanael, who was a good man, was eaſily taken off from this common prejudice, when Philip ſaid to him, *come and ſee.* He bids him come and ſee the works he did, and then refers it to him; whether he would believe his own eyes or an old proverb: However, it ſeems the Jews laid great weight upon it, as if this alone were enough to confute all his miracles; and, after they had ſhot this bolt at him, the buſineſs were concluded clearly againſt him. But prudent and conſiderate men do not uſe to give much credit to ill natured proverbs; the good or bad characters which are given of countries, are not underſtood to be univerſally true, and without exception. There is no place but hath brought forth ſome brave ſpirits, and excellent perſons, whatever the general temper and diſpoſition of the inhabitants may be. Among the Grecians, the Bœotians were eſteemed a dull people, even to a proverb; and yet Pindar, one of their chief Poets, was one of them. The Scythians were a barbarous nation, and one would have thought no good could have come from thence; and yet that country yielded Anacharſis an eminent Philoſopher. The Idumeans were aliens and ſtrangers to the covenant; and yet Job, one of the beſt men that ever was, came from thence. God can raiſe up eminent perſons from any place; Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and an idolatrous people. Nay, as our Saviour tells us,

he can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham. The wise God, in the government of the world, does not ty himself to our foolish proverbs. It is not necessary to make a man a prophet, that he should be bred in a good air. If God sends a man, it matters not from what place he comes.

Secondly, Another head of exception against our Saviour, was the meanness of his outward condition, so contrary to the universal expectation of the Jews. The Jews from the tradition of their fathers, to which they (as the Church of Rome does at this day) paid a greater reverence than to the written word of God, were possest with a strong persuasion, that the Messias, whom they expected, was to be a great Prince and conqueror, and to subdue all nations to them; so that nothing could be a greater defeat to their expectations, than the mean and low condition in which our Saviour appeared; so that upon this account they were almost universally offended at him.

But this prejudice was very unreasonable. For neither did their Prophets foretel any such thing, as the temporal greatness of the Messias: But on the contrary most expressly, that *he should be despised and rejected of men,* that *he should be a man of sorrows and sufferings,* and at last *be put to death*; which was directly contrary to what they expected from their ill-grounded tradition.

Thirdly, Against his miracles they made these two exceptions:

1. That he wrought them by magical skill, and by the power of the Devil.

Which was so exorbitantly unreasonable and malicious, that our Saviour pronounceth it to be an unpardonable sin; and for answer to it, appeals to every man's reason, whether it was likely that the Devil should conspire against himself, and assist any man to overthrow his own kingdom: For it was plain, our Saviour's doctrine was directly contrary to the Devil's design; and therefore to assist him to work miracles for the confirmation of it, must have been

been apparently against his own interest, and to the ruin of his own kingdom.

2. They pretended that though he did many great works, yet he gave them no sign from heaven. Matth. xvi. 1. it is said, *They desired him to shew them a sign from heaven,* It seems they expected that God should give some immediate testimony to him from heaven; as he did to Elias, when fire came down from heaven, and consumed his enemies; and particularly they expected, that when he was upon the cross, if he were the true Messias, he should have come down and saved himself. And because he did not answer their expectation in this, they concluded him an impostor.

Now what could be more unreasonable, when he had wrought so many other and great miracles, perversly to insist upon some particular kind of miracle which they fancied? as if God were bound to gratify the curiosity of men; and as if our Saviour were not as much *declared to be the Son of God, by rising again from the dead,* as if he had *come down from the cross.*

Fourthly, As to his conversation, they had these three exceptions:

1. That he used no severity in his habit or diet, took too much freedom, as they thought; *came eating and drinking,* that is, he freely used the creatures of God, for the end for which they were given, with temperance and thankfgiving; and did not lay those rigorous restraints upon himself in these matters, which many, that were esteemed the most religious among them, used to do.

But he plainly shews them, that this exception was merely out of their prejudice against him. For if he had come in the way of austerity, they would have rejected him as well. They were resolved to find fault with him whatever he did, Matth. xi. 16. *Whereunto shall I liken this generation? John the baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he hath a Devil.* He lived in a more austere and melancholy way, *he came in the way of righteousness,* used great strictness and severity in his habit

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and diet, and this they took exception at. Our Saviour was of a quite contrary temper, and that did not please them neither. *The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, behold a wine-bibber and a glutton!* So that let our Saviour have done what he would, he could not have carried himself so as to have escaped the censures of men, so peevishly and perversly disposed.

2. That he kept company with publicans and sinners.

To which exception nothing can be more reasonable than our Saviour's own answer; that he was sent to be a physician to the world, *to call sinners to repentance*; and therefore they had no reason to be angry, or think it strange, if he conversed with his patients, among whom his proper employment lay.

3. They objected to him profaneness in breaking the sabbath, and that surely was plain, that *he could not be of God, if he kept not the sabbath-day.* The truth was, he had healed on the sabbath-day.

To this our Saviour gives a most reasonable and satisfactory answer, that surely it was *lawful to do good on the sabbath-day*; that that was but a positive institution, but works of mercy are natural and moral duties; and God himself had declared, that he would have even his own institutions to give way to those greater duties, that are of natural and eternal obligation. *I will have mercy and not sacrifice.* And then from the end of the sabbath; the sabbath was made for the rest and refreshment of man, and therefore could not be presumed to be intended to his prejudice. *The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.*

Fifthly, Another great prejudice against him, was, that persons of the greatest knowledge and authority among them did not embrace his doctrine, John vii. 48. *Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him?* So that here was the infallible rule and authority of their church against him.

There is no doubt, but the example and authority of our guides ought to sway very much with us, and over-rule us in doubtful cases; but not against plain and

and convincing evidence; there we ought to follow *and obey God rather than men.* There is sometimes a visible and palpable corruption in those who are to lead us; they may have an interest to oppose the truth: And thus it was with the Pharisees and Rulers at that time; and so it hath been among Christians in the great degeneracy of the Roman church. The Christian religion was never more endangered, nor ever more corrupted, than by those who have been in greatest authority in that church, who ought to have understood religion best, and to have been the principal support of it. *Men may err*; but *God cannot*: So that when God sends a Prophet, or by his word does plainly declare his will to us, human example and authority ceaseth, and is of no force.

The last prejudice I shall mention, which the Jews had against our Saviour and his doctrine, was, that it did abolish and supersede their religion, as of no longer use and continuance though it was plain it was instituted by God.

This had been a very specious pretence indeed, had not this been part of their religion, and had not their own Prophets foretold, that the Messias should come and perfect what was wanting and defective in their institution. It is expresly said in their law, *That God would raise unto them another Prophet, like to Moses, and that they should hear him*, when he came. So that in truth it was the accomplishment of all those revelations which were made to the Jews, and did not reprove the Jewish religion as false, but as imperfect; and did not contradict and overthrow, but *perfect and fulfil the law and the Prophets.*

And thus I have gone over the chief exceptions and offences which the Jews took at our Saviour and his doctrine; and I hope sufficiently shewn the unreasonableness of them. I have not now time to proceed to what remains: But by what hath been said, you may easily see, upon what slight and unreasonable grounds men may be prejudiced against the best person and things, and yet be very confident all the while that they are in the right. For so no doubt many of the Jews, who opposed our Saviour

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our and his doctrine, thought themſelves to be. Therefore it concerns us to put on meekneſs, and humility, and modeſty, that we may be able to judge impartially of things, and our minds may be preſerved free and indifferent to receive the truths of God, when they are offered to us: Otherwiſe ſelf-conceit and paſſion will ſo blind our minds, and bias our judgments, that we ſhall be unable to diſcern, and unwilling to entertain the plaineſt and moſt evident truths. We ſee here by the ſad example of the Jews, that by giving way to paſſion, and cheriſhing pride and ſelf conceit, men may be ſo deeply prejudiced againſt the truth, as to reſiſt the cleareſt light, and reject even ſalvation itſelf, when it is offered to them. So that it is not in vain, that the ſcripture ſaith, *Let every wan be ſwift to hear, and ſlow to wrath, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God*; and exhorts us ſo earneſtly, *to receive with meekneſs the word of God, which is able to ſave our ſouls.*

SERMON CXVIII.

The prejudices againſt Chriſtianity conſidered.

MATTH. xi. 6.

And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

I Have from theſe words propounded to conſider two things:

I. Thoſe prejudices and objections which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion at their firſt appearance; as alſo to enquire into thoſe which men at this day do more eſpecially inſiſt upon, againſt the Chriſtian religion; and to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them.

II. How

II. How happy a thing it is to eſcape and overcome the common prejudices which men have againſt religion.

I have entered upon the firſt of theſe, the prejudices which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion. When this great teacher of mankind came from God, though he gave all imaginable teſtimony and evidence that he was ſent from heaven, yet the greateſt part of the world, both Jews and Gentiles, were mightily offended at him, and deeply prejudiced againſt him and his doctrine; but not both upon the ſame account.

I have already given you an account of the chief exceptions which the Jews made againſt our Saviour and his doctrine, and have ſhewn the unreaſonableneſs of them.

I proceed now to conſider the principal of thoſe exceptions, which the Gentiles and Heathen Philoſophers took at our Saviour and his doctrine. I ſhall mention theſe four.

Firſt, That Chriſtianity was a great innovation, and contrary to the received inſtitutions of the world.

Secondly, They objected againſt the plainneſs and ſimplicity of the doctrine.

Thirdly, That it wanted demonſtration.

Fourthly, That the low and ſuffering condition of our Saviour was unſuitable to one that pretended to be the Son of God, and to be appointed by him for a teacher and a reformer of the world. Theſe are the chief exceptions which the Heathen, and eſpecially their Philoſophers took at our Saviour and his doctrine.

Firſt, That the Chriſtian religion was a great innovation, and contrary to the received inſtitutions of the world; and conſequently that it did condemn the religion which had been ſo univerſally received and eſtabliſhed in the world by ſo long a continuance of time. And no wonder if this made a great impreſſion upon them, and raiſed a mighty prejudice in the minds of men againſt the Chriſtian religion; no prejudices being ſo ſtrong as thoſe that are fix-

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ed in the minds of men by education: And of all the prejudices of education, none ſo violent and hard to be removed as thoſe about religion, yea though they be never ſo groundleſs and unreaſonable. *Hath a nation changed their Gods, which yet are no Gods?* Intimating to us, that men are very hardly brought off from that religion which they have been brought up in, how abſurd ſoever it be. When Chriſtianity was firſt propounded to the Heathen world, had men been free and indifferent, and not prepoſſeſſed with other apprehenſions of God and religion, it might then have been expected from them, that they ſhould have entertained it with a readineſs of mind proportionable to the reaſonableneſs of it. But the caſe was quite otherwiſe: The world had for many ages been brought up to another way of worſhip, and inured to rites and ſuperſtitions of a quite different nature. And this ſways very much with men; *Sequimur majores noſtros, qui feliciter ſequuti ſuos*; as one of the Heathen ſaid in thoſe days, *We follow our anceſtors, who happily followed theirs.* Men are hardly brought to condemn thoſe opinions and cuſtoms in religion, which themſelves and their forefathers have always embraced and followed. And wiſe men eſpecially are loth to admit ſo great a change in a matter of ſo great a concernment as religion is. So that this muſt be acknowledged to have been a conſiderable prejudice againſt the Chriſtian religion at its firſt appearance. But yet upon a thorough examination, this will not be found ſufficient in reaſon to with-hold men from embracing Chriſtianity, if we conſider theſe four things.

1. No prudent perſon thinks that the example and cuſtom of his forefathers obligeth him to that which is evil in itſelf, and pernicious to him that does it; and there is no evil, nor danger equal to that of a falſe religion; for that tends to the ruin of men's ſouls, and their undoing for ever. A man might better alledge the example of his fore-fathers to juſtify his errors and follies in any other kind, than in this, which is ſo infinitely pernicious in the conſequences of it.

2. In

2. In a great corruption and degeneracy, it is no ſufficient reaſon againſt a reformation, that it makes a change. When things are amiſs, it is always fit to amend and reform them; and this cannot be done without a change. The wiſeſt among the Heathen did acknowledge, that their religion was mixed with very great follies and ſuperſtitions, and that the lives and manners of men were extremely corrupt and degenerate; and they endeavoured as much as they could and durſt to reform theſe things. And therefore there was no reaſon to oppoſe an effectual reformation, for fear of a change; a change of things for the better, though it be uſually hard to be effected, being always a thing to be deſired and wiſhed for.

3. The change which Chriſtianity deſigned, was the leaſt liable to exception that could be, being nothing elſe in the main of it, but the reducing of natural religion, the bringing of men back to ſuch apprehenſions of God, and ſuch a way of worſhipping him, as was moſt ſuitable to the divine nature, and to the natural notions of mens minds; nothing elſe but a deſign to perſuade men of the one true God, maker of the world; that he is a ſpirit, and to be worſhipped in ſuch a manner as is ſuitable to his ſpiritual nature. And then for matters of practice, to bring men to the obedience of thoſe precepts of temperance, and juſtice, and charity, which had been univerſally acknowledged even by the Heathen themſelves, to be the great duties which men owe to themſelves and others. And that this is the main deſign of the Chriſtian religion, the Apoſtle hath told us in moſt plain expreſs words, Tit. ii. 11, 12. *The grace of God*, (that is, the doctrine of the goſpel) *which hath appeared to all men, and brings ſalvation, teacheth us, that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.*

And all that the Chriſtian religion adds beyond this, is means and helps for our direction and aſſiſtance, and encouragement in the diſcharge and performance of theſe duties. For our direction, God hath ſent his

Son in our nature, to declare his will to us, and to be a pattern and example of holineſs and virtue. For our aſſiſtance, he hath promiſed the aids of his Holy Spirit; and for our encouragement, he offers to us pardon of ſin in the blood of his Son, and eternal life and happineſs in another world. This is a ſhort ſum and abridgment of the Chriſtian religion, and there is nothing of all this that can reaſonably be excepted againſt.

4. God, conſidering the prejudice of the Heathen againſt Chriſtianity, by reaſon of their education in a contrary religion, was ſtrong and violent, was pleaſed to give ſuch evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, as was of proportionable ſtrength and force to remove and conquer this prejudice. He was pleaſed to give teſtimony to the firſt founder of this religion by mighty miracles, and particularly by his reſurrection from the dead: But becauſe the report of theſe things was only brought to the heathen world, and they had not ſeen the things themſelves; therefore he enabled thoſe who were the witneſſes of theſe things to the world, to work as great miracles as he had done. And when they ſaw thoſe who gave teſtimony to our Saviour's miracles, do as great and ſtrange things themſelves, as they teſtified of him, there was no reaſon any longer to doubt of the truth of their teſtimony. So that though the prejudice of the Heathen againſt Chriſtianity was very great, yet the evidence which God gave to it was ſtrong enough to remove it. The doctrine of Chriſtianity was ſuch as might have recommended itſelf to impartial men, by its own reaſonableneſs: But meeting with violent prejudices in thoſe to whom it was offered, God was pleaſed to give ſuch a confirmation to it, as was ſufficient to bear down thoſe prejudices.

Secondly, Another objection againſt Chriſtianity, was the plainneſs and ſimplicity of the doctrine. They expected ſome deep ſpeculations in natural or moral Philoſophy; they made full account, a teacher ſent from heaven would have inſtructed them in the profoundeſt points, and diſcourſed to them about the firſt principles of things, and the nature of the ſoul,

and

and the chief end of man, with a ſubtilty and eloquence infinitely beyond that of their greateſt ſophiſters, and able to bear down all oppoſition and contradiction: But inſtead of this they are told a plain ſtory of the life and miracles of Jeſus Chriſt, and of his dying upon the croſs, and riſing from the dead, and aſcending into heaven; and a few plain precepts of life; and all this delivered without any ornaments of art, or inſinuation of eloquence, to gain the favour and applauſe of thoſe to whom they related theſe things.

But now, this truly conſidered is ſo far from being any real objection againſt the Chriſtian doctrine, that it is one of the greateſt commendations that can be given of it: For matter of fact ought to be related in the moſt plain and ſimple and unaffected manner; and the leſs art and eloquence is uſed in the telling of a ſtory, the more likely it is to gain belief. And as for our Saviour's precepts, how plain ſoever they might be, I am ſure they are a collection of the moſt excellent and reaſonable rules of a good life, and the freeſt from all vanity and folly, that are to be met with in any book in the world. And can any thing be more worthy of God, and more likely to proceed from him, than ſo plain and uſeful a doctrine as this? The language of law is not wont to be fine and perſuaſive, but ſhort, and plain, and full of authority. Thus it is among men: And ſurely it is much fitter for God to ſpeak thus to men, than for men to one another.

Thirdly, It is objected, That the doctrine of our Saviour and his Apoſtles wanted demonſtration; they ſeemed to impoſe too much upon the underſtandings of men, and to deliver things too magiſterially, not demonſtrating things from intrinſical arguments, but requiring belief and aſſent without proof.

This the Apoſtle St. Paul readily acknowledgeth, that in preaching the goſpel to the world, they did not proceed in the way of the heathen Orators and Philoſophers, 1 Cor. ii. 4. *My ſpeech, and my preaching was not in the enticing words of man's wiſdom: but in demonſtration of the Spirit, and of power*; that is,

they did not go in the way of human eloquence, and demonſtration: but yet their doctrine did not want its evidence and demonſtration, though of another kind. They did not go about to bewitch men by eloquence, nor to entangle their minds by ſubtle reaſonings, the force of which very few are capable of: But they offered to men a ſenſible proof and demonſtration of the truth of what they delivered, in thoſe ſtrange and miraculous operations, to which they were enabled by the Holy Ghoſt. And this was a ſenſible evidence, even to the meaneſt capacity, of a divine aſſiſtance going along with them, and giving teſtimony to them. I appeal to any man, whether the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt from the dead, and his aſcending into heaven, be not a clearer demonſtration of another life after this, and more level to the capacities of all mankind, than the fineſt and ſubtileſt arguments that can be drawn from the immaterial nature of the ſoul, its power of reflexion upon itſelf, and independency upon the body as to ſome of its operations; which yet are ſome of the chiefeſt arguments that philoſophy affords, to prove the immortality of our ſouls.

Fourthly, The Heathen objected, that the low and mean condition of our Saviour was unſuitable to one that pretended to be the Son of God, and to be appointed by God to be a teacher and reformer of the world. This to the heathen Philoſophers did not only appear unreaſonable, but even ridiculous. So St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. i. 23. *We preach Chriſt crucified, to the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs:* to think that a man who appeared in ſuch mean circumſtances, ſhould be fit to reform the world; and one who himſelf was put to death, ſhould be relied upon for life and immortality.

This objection I have heretofore conſidered at large; and therefore ſhall now ſpeak but very briefly to it.

Beſides thoſe excellent reaſons and ends which the ſcripture aſſigns of our Saviour's humiliation: as that he might be a teacher and example to us; that he might make expiation for our ſins; that by ſuffering himſelf

himſelf, he might learn to commiſerate us; that *by death he might deſtroy him that had the power of death, that is the Devil, and might deliver thoſe who through fear of death were all their lives ſubject to bondage*; I ſay, beſides theſe, it was of great uſe that he ſhould live in ſo mean and afflicted a condition, to confront the pride and vanity, and fantaſtry of the world; and to convince men of theſe two great truths, That God may love thoſe whom he afflicts; and, that men may be innocent, and virtuous, and contented in the midſt of poverty, and reproach, and ſuffering. Had our bleſſed Saviour been a great temporal Prince, his influence and example might poſſibly have made more hypocrites and ſervile converts; but would not have perſuaded men one jot more to be inwardly good and virtuous. The great arguments which muſt do that, muſt be fetched, not from the pomp and proſperity of this world, but from the eternal happineſs and miſery of the other. Beſides, had he appeared in any great power and ſplendor, the Chriſtian religion could not have been ſo clearly acquitted from the ſuſpicion of a worldly intereſt and deſign, which would have been a far greater objection againſt it, than this which I am now ſpeaking to.

Add to all this, that the wiſeſt of the heathen Philoſophers did teach, that worldly greatneſs and power are not to be admired, but deſpiſed by a truly wiſe man; that men may be virtuous and good, and dearly beloved of God, and yet be liable to great miſeries, and ſufferings; and that whoever ſuffers unjuſtly, and bears it patiently, gives the greateſt teſtimony to goodneſs, and does moſt effectually recommend virtue to the world; that a good man, under the hardeſt circumſtances of miſery, and reproach, and ſuffering, is the fitteſt perſon of all other to be the Miniſter, and Apoſtle, and Preacher of God to mankind: And ſurely they who ſay ſuch things (which the Heathen have done) had no reaſon to object to our bleſſed Saviour his low and ſuffering condition.

As to that part of the objection, that he who promiſed immortality to others, could not ſave himſelf

from death and ſuffering: conſidering that he who was put to death, reſcued himſelf from the power of the grave; it is ſo far from being ridiculous, that nothing can be more reaſonable than to rely upon him for our hopes of immortality, who by riſing from the grave, and conquering death, gave a plain demonſtration that he was able to make good what he promiſed.

I have done with the exceptions which were made againſt our Saviour and his doctrine at their firſt appearance in the world. I proceed in the

II. Place, to conſider the prejudices and objections which men at this day do more particularly inſiſt upon, againſt our Saviour and his religion: And they are many.

Firſt, Some that relate to the incarnation of our Saviour.

Secondly, To the time of his appearance.

Thirdly, That we have not now ſufficient evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which, at this diſtance, we have not, nor can be expected to have, ſufficient aſſurance.

Fourthly, That the terms of it ſeem very hard, and to lay too great reſtraints upon human nature.

Fifthly, That it is apt to diſpirit men, and to break the vigour and courage of their minds.

Sixthly, The diviſions and factions that are among Chriſtians.

Seventhly, The wicked lives of the greateſt part of the profeſſors of Chriſtianity. In anſwer to all which I do not propoſe to ſay all that may be ſaid, but as briefly as I can, to offer ſo much, as may, if not give full ſatisfaction, yet be ſufficient to break the force of them, and to free the minds of men from any great perplexity about them.

As to the *firſt*, which relates to the incarnation of our Saviour; and the *ſecond*, to the time of his appearance, I know that theſe and moſt of the reſt I have mentioned, were urged by the Heathen againſt Chriſtianity; but they are now more eſpecially inſiſted

ſiſted upon both by the ſecret and open enemies of our religion.

The objections againſt his incarnation I have elſewhere conſidered. [John i. 14. Serm. XLIII.] And therefore ſhall proceed to the next, *viz.*

Secondly, As to the time of our Saviour's appearance, it is objected, If he be the only way and means of ſalvation, why did he come no ſooner into the world; but ſuffer mankind ſo long without any hopes or means of being ſaved? This was objected by Porphyry of old, and ſtill ſticks in the minds of men. To this I anſwer,

1. It is not fit for creatures to call their Creator to too ſtrict an account of his actions. Goodneſs is free, and may act when and how it pleaſeth; and as God *will have mercy on whom he will have mercy*, ſo he may have mercy at what time he pleaſeth; and is not bound to give us an account of his matters. This is much like the objection of the Atheiſt againſt the being of God; that if there were ſuch an infinite and eternal Being, he would ſurely have made the world ſooner, and not have been without all employment for ſo long a duration; ſuch another objection is this againſt our Saviour, that if he had been the Son of God, he would have begun this great and merciful work of the redemption of mankind ſooner, and not have delayed it ſo long, and ſuffered mankind to periſh for four thouſand years together.

But it ſeems in the one as well as the other, God took his own time, and he beſt knew what time was fitteſt. The ſcripture tells us, that *in the fulneſs of time, God ſent his Son*; when things were ripe for it, and all things accompliſhed that God thought requiſite in order to it. In judging of the actions of our earthly governors, thoſe who are at a diſtance from their counſels, what conjectures ſoever they may make of the reaſons of them, will nevertheleſs, if they have that reſpect for their wiſdom which they ought, believe, that how ſtrange ſoever ſome of their actions may ſeem, yet they were done upon good reaſon, and that they themſelves, if they knew the

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ſecrets of their councils, ſhould think ſo. Much more do we owe that reverence to the infinite wiſdom of God, to believe that the counſels of his will are grounded upon very good reaſon, though we do not ſee many times what it is.

2. It is not true that the world was wholly deſtitute of a way and means of ſalvation before our Saviour's coming. Before the law of Moſes was given, men were capable of being received to the mercy and favour of God, upon their obedience to the law of nature, and their ſincere repentance for the violation of it, by virtue of *the Lamb that was ſlain from the foundation of the world.* Men were ſaved by Chriſt both before and under the law, without any particular and expreſs knowledge of him. There were good men in other nations, as well as among the Jews, as Job, and his friends alſo, ſeem to have been. In all ages of the world, and *in every nation, they that feared God and wrought righteouſneſs were accepted of him.* The ſacrifice of Chriſt, which is the meritorious cauſe of the ſalvation of mankind, looks back as well as forward; and God was reconcileable to men, and their ſins were pardoned, by virtue of this great propitiation that was to be made. In which ſenſe perhaps it is, that Chriſt is ſaid to be *the Lamb ſlain from the foundation of the world,* Heb. ix. 25, 26. The Apoſtle intimates to us, that if this ſacrifice, which was offered in the laſt ages of the world, had not been available in former ages, *Chriſt muſt have often ſuffered ſince the foundation of the world: But now hath he appeared once in the concluſion of the ages, to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf.*

3. He did appear at that time in which the world ſtood moſt in need of him; when the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles, were ſunk into the greateſt degeneracy, both in opinion and practice, and the condition of mankind ſeemed to be even deſperate and paſt remedy. This was the needful time, when it was moſt ſeaſonable for this great phyſician to come, and ſhew his pity and his skill in our recovery. God could have ſent his Son many ages before; but he thought fit to try other ways firſt, and to reſerve

ſerve this powerful remedy to the laſt; *laſt of all he ſent his Son.*

4 The time of our Saviour's appearing was of all ages of the world the fitteſt ſeaſon for his coming; whether we conſider,

1. That the world was at that time beſt prepared and diſpoſed for receiving the Chriſtian religion: Or,

2. That this was the fitteſt ſeaſon that ever had been, for the eaſy diffuſing and propagating of this religion. I aſſign theſe reaſons as tending to give men ſome ſatisfaction, why this great bleſſing was delayed ſo long; it being rather an argument of wiſdom and goodneſs, than of the want of either, to defer things to that time, in which they are moſt likely to have their effect. Not but that perhaps other and better reaſons may be given. To be ſure, God had very good reaſons for this diſpenſation, whether we can hit upon them or not. In the mean time theſe ſeem not to be altogether inconſiderable:

1. That the world was at that time beſt prepared and diſpoſed for receiving the Chriſtian religion. All the while our Saviour's coming was delayed, God's providence was diſpoſing things for it, and training up mankind for the entertaining of this great bleſſing. The Jewiſh religion was always very burdenſome, but much more ſo, towards the expiration of the Jewiſh ſtate, partly by the intolerable multitude of external obſervances, which were daily multiplied upon them, under pretence of traditions from their fathers; and partly by reaſon of their ſubjection to the Romans, which made the exerciſe of their religion in many reſpects more difficult.

And the Heathen world was in a very good meaſure prepared for Chriſtianity, by being civilized. About the time of our Saviour's coming into the world, philoſophy and learning had been ſo diffuſed by the Roman conqueſts, as had brought a great part of the world from barbariſm to civility. Beſides, that their philoſophy had this effect upon men, to refine their reaſ-

reaſon, and in a good degree to detect the follies of the Heathen idolatry and ſuperſtition.

It is true indeed learning and philoſophy flouriſhed a great while before, in the time of the Grecian empire, and perhaps before that in ſome other nations; and the conqueſts of the Grecians were very ſpeedy and of vaſt extent: But yet they were neither ſo univerſal, nor ſo well ſettled; nor did they propagate their philoſophy and civility together with their conqueſts, as the Romans did. So that there was no age of the world, wherein mankind were ſo generally prepared and diſpoſed for the receiving of the goſpel, as that wherein our Saviour appeared.

2. This was likewiſe the fitteſt ſeaſon for the eaſy diffuſing and propagating of the Chriſtian religion. The Romans, together with their conqueſts, did very much propagate their language, which made the ways of communication far more eaſy; and by the long and frequent correſpondence of the ſeveral parts of that empire one with another, the ways of travel and paſſage from one country to another were more ready and open. So that no age can be inſtanced, in all reſpects ſo convenient for the ſpeedy propagating of a new religion, as that wherein our Saviour appeared, *viz.* when the Roman empire was at its height. And it was very agreeable to the goodneſs and wiſdom of the divine providence, that the braveſt and moſt virtuous people in the world (infinitely beyond either the Perſians or Grecians) ſhould be choſen by God, as one of the chiefeſt means for the ſpreading of the beſt and moſt perfect revelation that ever God made to the world.

Thirdly, It is objected, that we have not now ſufficient evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which at this diſtance, we have not, nor can be ſuppoſed to have, ſufficient aſſurance. To this I anſwer,

1. That men not only may have, but have an undoubted aſſurance of matters of fact, ancienter than theſe we are ſpeaking of; and the diſtance of them from our times creates no manner of ſcruple in the minds

minds of men concerning them. That there was ſuch a man as Alexander the Great, and that he conquered Darius and the Perſians; that Julius Cæſar invaded our nation, and in ſome meaſure ſubdued it; and that he overcame Pompey in the battle of Pharſalia; and innumerable other things which I might inſtance in, that were done before our Saviour's time, are firmly believed without any manner of doubt and ſcruple by mankind, notwithſtanding they were done ſo long ago. So that ancient matters of fact are capable of clear evidence, and we may have ſufficient aſſurance of them. And where there is equal evidence, if we do not give equal belief, the fault is not in the argument, but in the paſſion or prejudice of thoſe to whom it is propoſed.

2. We have every whit as great aſſurance, (nay, greater, if it can, or needed to be) of the matters upon which the proof of Chriſtianity relies, as of thoſe which I have mentioned. The matters of fact upon which the truth of Chriſtianity relies, are, That there was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt; that he wrought ſuch miracles; that he was put to death at Jeruſalem under Pontius Pilate; that he roſe again from the dead, and was viſibly taken up into heaven; that he beſtowed miraculous gifts and powers upon the Apoſtles, to make them competent witneſſes of his reſurrection, and of the truth of that doctrine, which they publiſhed in his name; that accordingly they preached the goſpel to the world, and in a ſhort ſpace, without any human advantages, did propagate it, and gain entertainment for it in moſt parts of the then known world.

Now theſe matters of fact have the ſame teſtimony of hiſtories, wrote in thoſe times, and conveyed down to us, by as general and uncontrouled a tradition, as the conqueſts of Alexander and Julius Cæſar. So that if we do not afford equal belief to them, it is a ſign that we have ſome prejudice or intereſt againſt the one more than againſt the other, though the evidence for both be equal. Nay, I go farther, that the evidence for theſe things, which are the foundation of Chriſtianity, is ſo much the greater, becauſe

becauſe that which depended upon it was of far greater concerment to the world, and conſequently mankind were more obliged to ſearch more narrowly into it.

For our Saviour's life, and death, and reſurrection, we have the teſtimony of a great number of eye-witneſſes, who have wrote the hiſtory of theſe things. And though they were truly extraordinary perſons, and gave teſtimony to themſelves by miracles; yet at preſent I deſire no more, but that they be looked upon, as knowing and honeſt relators of what they heard and ſaw; and that the ſame credit be given to them which we give to Livy, and Arrian, and Q. Curtius, for plain events, and matters of fact.

But yet I muſt add withal, that beſides the miracles which they wrought, they gave greater teſtimony of their integrity, than any hiſtorian in the world ever did. For they willingly ſuffered the greateſt perſecution and torment, yea and death itſelf, in confirmation of the truth of what they delivered. And for the propagating of the Chriſtian religion through ſo great a part of the world, it is evident by the effect beyond all denial.

So that for the matters of fact, upon which the truth of Chriſtianity does depend, here is greater and more advantageous evidence of hiſtory, than for any other matter of equal antiquity whatſoever.

3. As to the ſubſtance of theſe matters of fact, we have the concurring teſtimony of the greateſt enemies of the Chriſtian religion. That there were ſuch perſons as our Saviour and his Apoſtles, that they preached ſuch a doctrine, that they wrought ſuch miracles; for this we have the acknowledgment of the Jews, and the teſtimony of the heathen Hiſtorians, and particularly of Celſus, and Porphyry, and Julian, who were the particular and moſt learned adverſaries of the Chriſtian religion. So that as to the matters of fact, there is no objection againſt them, whatever uſe we may make of them, or whatever conſequences we may draw from them. And I preſume it agreed by all objectors, that if theſe matters

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of fact be true, they are a ſufficient foundation of the truth of our religion, and we are very unequal to our religion, if we make a doubt of theſe things, which the greateſt enemies of Chriſtianity never had the face to deny.

4. And beſides all this, to recompence the diſadvantage which we have of thoſe who ſaw the miracles of our Saviour and his Apoſtles, we have the *teſtimonium rei*, the evidence of the effects of theſe things to confirm our belief of them; and this is an advantage which the firſt ages of Chriſtianity could not have. We ſee our Saviour's predictions of the ſucceſs of his religion in the world, in the propagating and eſtabliſhing of it, fully accompliſhed, notwithſtanding the fierce oppoſition and reſiſtance that was made againſt it by the greateſt powers of the world. We ſee the diſperſion of the Jews in all nations, and the miſery and contempt which they every where ſuffer; and that now, for above ſixteen hundred years, they have continued a diſtinct people, and a ſpectacle of the divine juſtice and ſeverity, for rejecting and crucifying the Son of God, and for a laſting and ſtanding teſtimony of the truth of our Saviour's prediction, and of the Chriſtian religion.

So that though we live at this diſtance from the firſt riſe and beginning of Chriſtianity; yet we have the relation of thoſe things, which gave confirmation to it, conveyed down to us in as credible a manner as any ancient matter of fact ever was; and the effects of theſe things remaining to this day, do give teſtimony to the truth of it.

Fourthly, It is objected, that the terms of Chriſtianity ſeem very hard, and to lay too great reſtraints upon human nature. It commands us to mortify our luſts, and ſubdue our paſſions, and *deny ungodlineſs, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world: to be holy in all manner of converſation*; to have reſpect to *whatever things are honeſt and true, and juſt, and virtuous, and of good report*; and to *deny ourſelves*; and to part with the deareſt enjoyments of this life, yea and with life itſelf, for the ſake of Chriſt, and his goſpel. Now

theſe ſeem to be very hard terms; to forego all the preſent pleaſures and enjoyments of this life, in hopes of a future happineſs which we are leſs aſſured of.

To this I anſwer,

1. That this is a greater objection againſt religion in general, than the Chriſtian religion. For natural religion requires of us all the main duties that Chriſtianity does, and gives us far leſs aſſurance of the reward of our obedience. Natural religion requires piety, and juſtice, and charity, the due government of our appetites and paſſions, as well as Chriſtianity does, but does not diſcover to us the rewards of another world, by many degrees ſo clearly, as our Lord and Saviour, who hath *brought life and immortality to light by the goſpel*; and by his reſurrection from the dead, and aſcenſion into heaven, hath given us full aſſurance of another life after this, and of a glorious immortality. So that though we have not, nor can have the evidence of ſenſe, for a future ſtate, yet we have all the rational evidence for it, that can be wiſhed or expected; and much more than men have for thoſe adventures of their lives and fortunes, which they frequently make in the world, and think themſelves reaſonable in ſo doing.

2. The reſtraints which Chriſtianity lays upon men, are in the judgment of mankind ſo far from being an objection againſt it, that they are highly to the commendation of it. Nay, it were the greateſt objection that could be againſt our religion, if it did ſet us at liberty from thoſe reſtraints. What can be more to the credit of any religion, than to command men to be juſt, and charitable, and peaceable? and what more to the advantage of the profeſſors of it? And on the contrary, what can reflect more upon any religion, than to indulge and allow men in any vice contrary to theſe? It ſhews men are glad to make any thing an objection againſt Chriſtianity, when they lay hold of that, which if it had been otherwiſe, they would have have made ten times more clamour againſt it for the contrary.

3. As for moſt of theſe reſtraints which Chriſtianity lays upon us, they are of that nature, ſo much

much both for our private and publick advantage; that ſetting aſide all conſiderations of religion, and of the rewards and puniſhments of another life, they are really good for us, and if God had not laid them upon us, we ought in reaſon, in order to our temporal benefit and advantage, to have laid them upon ourſelves. If there were no religion, I know men would not have ſuch ſtrong and forcible obligations to theſe duties: But yet I ſay, though there were no religion, it were good for men, in order to temporal ends, to their health, and quiet, and reputation, and ſafety; in a word, to the private and publick proſperity of mankind, that men ſhould be temperate, and chaſte, and juſt, and peaceable, and charitable, and kind, and obliging to one another, rather than the contrary. So that religion does not create thoſe reſtraints arbitrarily, but requires thoſe things of us, which our reaſon, and a regard to our own advantage, which the neceſſity and conveniency of the things themſelves, without any conſideration of religion, would in moſt caſes urge us to.

4. As to the caſe of perſecution for religion; beſides that it does not now happen ſo frequently as it did in the beginning of Chriſtianity, nay, very ſeldom in compariſon, if all things be conſidered, it cannot be thought unreaſonable, both becauſe religion offers to us, in conſideration of our preſent ſufferings, a happineſs unſpeakably greater than that which we forego for the ſake of religion; and becauſe when it happens, God does extraordinarily enable men to go through it with courage and comfort, as we ſee in the examples of the primitive Chriſtians, who in great numbers, of all tempers and ages, did voluntarily chooſe to give up themſelves to theſe ſufferings, when there was no neceſſity laid upon them, but fair terms of retreat were offered to them by their enemies. It is one thing when a man ſuffers by the law, and cannot help it; and another thing when men may avoid ſuffering. In the former caſe, men ſubmit to neceſſity, and bear it as well as they can; in the latter caſe, if men ſuffer, it is a ſign they firmly believe the reward of it; and if they ſuffer chear-

fully, and with joy, as moſt of the martyrs did, it is plain evidence that God affords them extraordinary ſupport in their ſufferings; and then the caſe is not very hard, when religion puts them upon nothing but what it gives them cauſe, and enables them to rejoice in the doing of it.

Fifthly, It is objected, that the Chriſtian religion is apt to diſpirit men, and to break the courage and vigour of their minds, by the precepts of patience, and humility, and meekneſs, and forgiving injuries, and the like. This objection hath made a great noiſe in the world, and hath been urged by men of great reputation, and a deep inſight into the tempers of men, and affairs of the world. It is ſaid to be particularly inſiſted upon by Machiavel, and very likely it may, though I think that elſewhere he is pleaſed to ſpeak with terms of reſpect, not only of religion in general, but likewiſe of the Chriſtian religion; and (which ſeems very much to contradict the other) he ſays in the firſt book of his diſcourſes upon Livy, (chap. 11.) that the greatneſs and ſucceſs of Rome is chiefly to be aſcribed to their piety and religion; and that Rome was more indebted to Numa Pompilius for ſettling religion among them, than to Romulus the founder of their ſtate; and the reaſon he gives is much to our preſent purpoſe; for, ſays he, without religion there can be no military diſcipline, religion being the foundation of good laws and good diſcipline. And particularly he commends the Samnites, who betook themſelves to religion, as their laſt and beſt remedy to make men couragious, nothing being more apt to raiſe mens ſpirits than religion.

But howſoever this objection be, I dare appeal both to reaſon and experience for the confutation of it.

1. To reaſon, and that as to theſe two things:

(1.) That the Chriſtian religion is apt to plant in the minds of men principles of the greateſt reſolution and trueſt courage. It teacheth men upon the beſt and moſt rational grounds to deſpiſe dangers, yea and death itſelf, the greateſt and moſt formidable e-

vil

vil in this world; and this principle is likely to inſpire men with the greateſt courage; for what need he fear any thing in this world, who fears not death, after which there is nothing in this world to be feared? And this the Chriſtian religion does, by giving men the aſſurance of another life, and a happineſs infinitely greater than any is to be enjoyed in this world. And in order to the ſecuring of this happineſs, it teacheth men to be holy, and juſt, and to exerciſe a good conſcience both towards God and man, which is the only way to free a man from all inward and tormenting fears of what may happen to him after death. This makes *the righteous* man to be (as Solomon ſays) *bold as a lion.* Nothing renders a man more undaunted as to death, and the conſequences of it, than the peace of his own mind; for a man not to be conſcious to himſelf of having wilfully diſpleaſed him, who alone can make us happy or miſerable in the other world. So that a good man, being ſecure of the favour of God, may, upon that account, reaſonably hope for a greater happineſs after death than other men: whereas a bad man, if he be ſober, and have his ſenſes awakened to a ſerious conſideration of things, cannot but be afraid to dy; and be extremely anxious and ſolicitous what will become of him in another world. And ſurely it would make the ſtouteſt man breathing afraid to venture upon death, when he ſees hell beyond it. Poſſibly there may be ſome monſters of men, who may have ſo far ſuppreſſed the ſenſe of religion, and ſtupified their conſciences, as in a good meaſure to have conquered the fears of death, and of the conſequences of it. But this happens but to very few, as the Poet tells us in the perſon of an Epicurean:

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoſcere cauſas,
Atque metus omnes & inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, ſtrepitumque Acherontis avari.

There are very few that attain to this temper, but at ſome times. So that if vice and wickedneſs do generally break the firmneſs of mens ſpirits; it re-

mains, that nothing but religion can generally give men courage againſt death. And this the Chriſtian religion does eminently to thoſe who live according to it; our bleſſed Saviour having delivered us from the fear of death, by conquering death for us, and giving us aſſurance of the glorious rewards of another life.

(2.) Meekneſs, and patience, and humility, and modeſty, and ſuch virtues of Chriſtianity, do not in reaſon tend to diſpirit men, and break their true courage, but only to regulate it, and take away the fierceneſs and brutiſhneſs of it. This we ſee in experience, that men of the trueſt courage have many times leaſt of pride and inſolence, of paſſion and fierceneſs. Thoſe who are better bred are commonly of more gentle and civil diſpoſitions: but yet they do not therefore want true courage, though they have not the roughneſs and fool-hardineſs of men of ruder breeding. So in a true Chriſtian, courage and greatneſs of mind is very conſiſtent with meekneſs, and patience, and humility. Not that all good men are very couragious; there is much of this in the natural temper of men, which religion does not quite alter. But that which I am concerned to maintain is, that Chriſtianity is no hinderance to mens courage, and that *ceteris paribus*, ſuppoſing men of equal tempers, no man hath ſo much reaſon to be valiant, as he that hath a good conſcience; I do not mean a bluſtering, and boiſterous, and raſh courage; but a ſober, and calm, and fixt valour.

2. I appeal to experience for the truth of this. Did ever greater courage and contempt of death appear in all ages and ſexes, and conditions of men, than in the primitive martyrs? were any of the heathen ſoldiers comparable to the Chriſtian legion, for reſolution and courage, even the Heathen themſelves being judges? The religion of Mahomet ſeems to be contrived to inſpire men with fierceneſs and deſperateneſs of reſolution, and yet I do not find but that generally where there hath been any equality for numbers, the Chriſtians have been ſuperior to them in valour, and have given greater inſtances of reſolu-

reſolution and courage than the Turks have done. So that I wonder upon what grounds this objection hath been taken up againſt Chriſtianity, when there is nothing either in the nature of this religion, or from the experience of the world, to give any tolerable countenance to it. And ſurely the beſt way to know what effect any religion is likely to have upon the minds of men, is to conſider what effects it hath had in the conſtant experience of mankind. There remains the other two objections, which I mentioned; but I muſt reſerve them to another opportunity.

SERMON CXIX.

The prejudices againſt Jeſus and his religion conſidered.

MATTH. xi. 6.

And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

FROM theſe words I propoſed to conſider theſe two things:

I. The prejudices and objections which the world at firſt had, and many ſtill have, againſt our bleſſed Saviour and his religion.

II. That it is a great happineſs to eſcape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain againſt religion.

I have conſidered thoſe objections which the Jews and heathen Philoſophers made againſt our Saviour and his religion: And,

II. Thoſe which at this day are inſiſted upon by the ſecret and open enemies of our religion. And I mentioned ſeven; the two laſt of which I ſhall now ſpeak to.

Sixthly,

Sixthly, It is objected, that there are many diviſions and factions among Chriſtians. This I confeſs is a great reproach and ſcandal to our religion: but no ſufficient argument againſt it. And,

1. To leſſen and abate the force of this objection, it is to be conſidered, that a very great part of the diviſions that are among thoſe that are called Chriſtians, are about things that do not concern the eſſentials of Chriſtianity, and therefore they are no argument that Chriſtianity is not true, becauſe they bring no ſuſpicion of doubt and uncertainty upon the fundamentals of Chriſtianity, which all agree in, though they differ in other things. 'Tis true indeed they are very undecent, and contrary to the nature and precepts of the Chriſtian religion, which, above any religion in the world, does ſtrictly require love and unity. They take off much from the ſtrength and beauty of religion, but do by no means deſtroy the truth of it.

2. How many and great ſoever they may be, yet they can with no colour of reaſon be imputed to the Chriſtian religion, as giving any cauſe or encouragement to them, however by accident it may be the occaſion of them. For no man doubts but that the beſt things in the world may be perverted by bad men, and made an occaſion of a great deal of miſchief in the world, and yet be very innocent of all that miſchief. No man can deny but that Chriſtianity does ſtrictly enjoin love, and peace, and unity among all the members of that profeſſion; and ſo far as Chriſtians are factious and unpeaceable, ſo far they are no Chriſtians. So that a man may as well except againſt Philoſophy, becauſe of the differences that were among the Philoſophers, and ſay there was no truth among them, becauſe they were not all agreed in all things, as call the truth of Chriſtianity in queſtion, for the differences that are among Chriſtians. Nay, a man might every whit as well except againſt laws and government; becauſe notwithſtanding them, there are frequent ſeditions, and rebellions, infinite ſuits and controverſies occaſioned even by the very laws: but no man was ever ſo unreaſonable

reaſonable as to think this a good reaſon againſt laws and government.

3. The diviſions of Chriſtians are ſo far from being an argument againſt Chriſtianity, that, on the contrary, they are an argument that men ſhould embrace Chriſtianity more heartily, and make more conſcience of obeying the precepts of it. And if they did this, the greateſt part of thoſe contentions and uncharitable animoſities which are among them would preſently ceaſe. If the Chriſtian religion were truly entertained, and men did ſeriouſly mind the precepts of it, and give up themſelves to the obedience of its laws, differences would not be eaſily commenced, nor ſo vehemently proſecuted, nor ſo pertinaciouſly continued in, as they are. Men would not, upon every ſlight reaſon, and little doubt and ſcruple, rend and tear the body of Chriſt in pieces, and ſeparate themſelves from the communion of the church they live in, and in which they were baptized and received their Chriſtianity.

If men ſeriouſly conſidered, and truly underſtood what they do, when they divide the church of Chriſt upon little ſcruples and pretences, they would hardly be able to think themſelves Chriſtians, whilſt they continued in theſe unchriſtian and uncharitable practices.

If men would but be, or do what Chriſtianity requires, there would be no occaſion for this objection; and if men will not, Chriſtian religion is not to be blamed for it, but thoſe that act ſo contrary to the plain precepts and directions of it. I proceed to the

Seventh and *laſt* objection, the vicious and wicked lives of a great part of the profeſſors of Chriſtianity. This is a heavy objection indeed, and ſuch an one, that though we may juſtly be aſhamed to own the truth of it, yet can we not have the face to deny it. It is ſo ſad a truth, that it is enough to confound us, and to fill all our faces with ſhame and bluſhing; but yet it is an objection not ſo ſtrong againſt Chriſtianity, as it is ſhameful to Chriſtians.

And

And notwithſtanding the utmoſt force of it, we have no cauſe to be aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt; but the goſpel of Chriſt may juſtly be aſhamed of us. For whatever we be, *the goſpel of Chriſt is the power of God unto ſalvation.* The natural tendency of it is to reform and ſave men, and *the wrath of God is therein revealed againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, however they may detain the truths of God in unrighteouſneſs,* and not ſuffer them to have their due and proper influence upon their hearts and lives.

But that I may give a more clear and particular anſwer to it, I deſire you to attend to theſe following conſiderations:

1. It cannot be denied, but that Chriſtianity hath had once very great and marvellous effects upon the hearts and lives of men. And for this I appeal to the lives and manners of the primitive Chriſtians, for which we have not only the teſtimony of our own books and writers, but even of the adverſaries of our religion. What reformation Chriſtianity at firſt wrought in the manners of men, we have clear and full teſtimony, from what the Apoſtles wrote concerning the ſeveral churches which they planted in ſeveral parts of the world. What hearty unity and affection there was among Chriſtians, even to that degree, as to make men bring in their private eſtates and poſſeſſions for the common ſupport of their brethren, we may read in the hiſtory of the Acts of the Apoſtles. The city of Corinth, by the account which Strabo gives of it, was a very vicious and luxurious place, as moſt in the world; and yet we ſee by St. Paul, what a ſtrange reformation the Chriſtian religion made in the lives and manners of many of them; 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. *Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor idolaters, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God. And ſuch were ſome of you: but ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified, but ye are juſtified, in the name of the Lord Jeſus, and by the Spirit of our God.* And ſurely it is no ſmall matter

to

to reclaim men from ſuch a profligate courſe of life. The Apoſtle inſtanceth in crimes and vices of the firſt rate, from which yet he tells us many were cleanſed and purified *by the name of the Lord Jeſus, and the Spirit of God*; that is, by the power and efficacy of the Chriſtian doctrine, together with the cooperation of God's Holy Spirit.

After the Apoſtles, the ancient Fathers, in their apologies for Chriſtianity, give us a large account of the great power and efficacy of the Chriſtian doctrine upon the lives and manners of men. Tertullian tells the Roman Governors, that their priſons were full of malefactors, committed for ſeveral crimes; but they were all Heathen. *De veſtris ſemper æſtuat carcer, their priſons were thronged with criminals of their own religion*; but there were no Chriſtians to be found committed there for ſuch crimes; *Nemo illic Chriſtianus, niſi hoc tantùm*, &c. *There were no Chriſtians in their priſons, but only upon account of their religion.* Or if there were any malefactors that had been Chriſtians, they left their religion when they fell into thoſe enormities. And afterwards he adds, that if Chriſtians were irregular in their lives, they were no longer accounted Chriſtians, but were baniſhed from their communion as unworthy of it. And they appealed to the Heathen, what a ſudden and ſtrange change Chriſtianity had made in ſeveral of the moſt lewd, and vicious, and debauched perſons, and what a viſible reformation there preſently appeared in the lives of the worſt of men, after they had once entertained the Chriſtian doctrine.

And theſe teſtimonies are ſo much the ſtronger, becauſe they are publick appeals to our adverſaries, which it is not likely they who were ſo proſecuted and hated as the Chriſtians were, would have had the confidence to have made, if they had not been notoriouſly true, even their enemies themſelves being judges.

And that they were ſo, we have the confeſſion of the Heathen themſelves. I ſhall produce two remarkable teſtimonies to this purpoſe, and one of them from the pen of one of the bittereſt enemies that the Chriſtian religion ever had.

Pliny

Pliny, in his epiſtle to Trajan the Emperor, gives him an account, "That having examined the Chriſtians, ſetting aſide the ſuperſtition of their way, he "could find no fault; and that this was the ſum "of their error, that they were wont to meet before day, and ſing a hymn to Chriſt, and to "bind themſelves by ſolemn oath or ſacrament, not "to any wicked purpoſe, but not to ſteal, nor rob, "nor commit adultery, nor break their faith, nor "detain the pledge." So that it ſeems the ſum of their error was, to oblige themſelves in the ſtricteſt manner againſt the greateſt vices and crimes. Which methinks is a great teſtimony from an enemy and a judge, one who would have been ready to diſcover their faults, and had opportunity of enquiring into them.

My other witneſs is Julian the Emperor and Apoſtate, who, in one of his epiſtles, tells us, "The "Chriſtians did ſeverely puniſh ſedition and im-"piety." And afterwards exhorting the heathen Prieſts to all offices of humanity, and eſpecially alms towards the poor; he tells them, they ought to be more careful in this particular, and to mend this fault; *becauſe* (ſays he) *the Galileans taking advantage of our neglect in this kind, have very much ſtrengthened their impiety* (for ſo he calls their religion) *by being very intent upon theſe offices, and exemplary in their charity to the poor, whereby they gained many over to them.*

And in his 49th epiſtle to *Arſacius* the High-prieſt of Galatia, he recommends to him, among other means for the advancement of Paganiſm, the building of hoſpitals, and great liberality to the poor, not only of their own religion, but others. *For*, ſays he, *it is a ſhame that the impious Galileans ſhould not only maintain their own poor, but ours alſo; wherefore let us not ſuffer them to out-do us in this virtue.* Nothing but the force of truth could have extorted ſo full an acknowledgment of the great humanity and charity of the Chriſtians, from ſo bitter an enemy of our religion as Julian was. If he owned it, we may be ſure it was very great and exemplary.

So

So that you ſee that the Chriſtian religion had a very great power and efficacy upon the lives and manners of men when it firſt appeared in the world. And the true ſpirit and genius of any religion, the force of any inſtitution, is beſt ſeen in the primitive effects of it; before it be weakened and diſpirited by thoſe corruptions, which in time are apt to inſinuate themſelves into the beſt things. For all laws and inſtitutions are commonly more vigorous, and have greater effects at firſt, than afterwards; and the beſt things are apt in time to degenerate, and to contract ſoil and ruſt. And it cannot in reaſon be expected otherwiſe. So that though it be a thing to be bewailed, and by the greateſt care and diligence to be reſiſted, yet it is not ſo extremely to be wondered at, if Chriſtianity, in the ſpace of ſixteen hundred years, hath abated much of its firſt ſtrength and vigour.

Eſpecially conſidering, that there were ſeveral circumſtances, that gave Chriſtianity mighty advantages at firſt, eſpecially the miraculous powers which did accompany the firſt publication of the goſpel; which muſt needs be full of conviction to thoſe who ſaw the wonderful effects of it: the extraordinary operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men to diſpoſe them to the receiving of it: the perſecuted and ſuffering ſtate that Chriſtians were generally in, which made thoſe who embraced the profeſſion to be generally ſerious and in good earneſt in it, and kept up a continual heat and zeal in the minds of men for that religion which coſt them ſo dear, and for which they ſuffered ſo much: and the fury of their enemies againſt it did naturally inflame their love and kindneſs to one another; nothing being a greater endearment among men, than common ſufferings in a common cauſe. So long as Chriſtians were not corrupted by ſecular intereſts, and, by denying all for Chriſt, were free from covetouſneſs and ambition, the great roots of all evil, the church of Chriſt, *tho' ſhe was black, yet ſhe was comely, and terrible as an army with banners*; ſhe was all this while in an excellent poſture to reſiſt the temptations, and

fight againſt the vices and corruptions of the world; but after the world broke in upon the church, and Chriſtianity was countenanced by the powers of the world, and watered with ſecular preferments and encouragements, no wonder if the tares began to grow up with the wheat: then *iniquity began to abound, and the love of many to wax cold.* When the ſun of proſperity began to ſhine upon the Chriſtian profeſſion, then no wonder if the vermin bred and ſwarmed every where. When it grew creditable and advantageous for men to be Chriſtians, this muſt in all reaſon make a world of hypocrites, and counterfeit profeſſors.

Theſe things, I reckon, muſt in reaſon make a mighty difference between the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, and thoſe which have followed ſince; and no wonder if the real fruits and effects of religion in theſe ſeveral ſtates of Chriſtianity be very unequal. For proſperity and adverſity made a wide difference in this matter. The perſecution of any religion naturally makes the profeſſors of it real; and the proſperity of it does as naturally allure and draw in hypocrites. Beſides, that even the beſt of men are more corrupted by proſperity than affliction.

But though Chriſtians were beſt under perſecution, yet God did not think fit always to continue them in that ſtate, becauſe he would not tempt them and tire them out with perpetual ſufferings; and after he had given the world a ſufficient experiment of the power and efficacy of the Chriſtian religion, in maintaining and propagating itſelf in deſpite of all the violence and oppoſition of the world, ſufficient for ever to give reputation to it; he then thought good to leave it to be kept up by more human ways, and ſuch as offer leſs violence to the nature of man. Being once eſtabliſhed and ſettled in the world, and upon equal terms of advantage with other religions, God left it to be ſupported by more ordinary means; by pious education, and diligent inſtruction, and good laws and government, without miracles, and without perſecution, and without thoſe extraordinary and overpowering com-

communications of his grace and Spirit which he afforded to the firſt ages of Chriſtianity.

I have inſiſted the longer upon this, that men may ſee what effects Chriſtianity hath had upon the lives of men, by which we may ſee the proper nature and efficacy of it; and withal may not wonder ſo much that it hath not the ſame effects now: Though it be matter of great ſhame to us, that they are ſo vaſtly diſproportionable to what they were at firſt.

2. Though the diſproportion be very great between the effects of Chriſtianity at firſt, and what it hath now upon the lives of men; yet we ought not to deny, but it hath ſtill ſome good effects upon mankind; and it is our great ſhame and fault that it hath no better. If we will ſpeak juſtly of things, as to the general civility of life and manners, freedom from tyranny, and barbarouſneſs, and cruelty, and ſome other enormous vices; yea and as to the exemplary piety and virtue of great numbers of particular perſons of ſeveral nations, there is no compariſon between the general ſtate of Chriſtendom, and the Pagan and Mahometan parts of the world. Next to Chriſtianity, and the law of Moſes, (which was confined to one nation) philoſophy was the moſt likely inſtrument to reform mankind that hath been in the world; and it had very conſiderable effects upon ſome particular perſons; both as to the rectifying of their opinions, and the reforming of their lives: but upon the generality of mankind it did very little in either of theſe reſpects, eſpecially as to the rectifying of the abſurd and impious opinions of the people concerning God, and their ſuperſtitious worſhip of the Deity. Whereas the Chriſtian religion did univerſally, wherever it came, ſet men free from thoſe groſs impieties and ſuperſtitions, and taught men to worſhip the only true God in a right manner.

Though we muſt confeſs, to the eternal reproach of the Chriſtian religion, that the weſtern church hath degenerated ſo far, that it ſeems to be in a great meaſure relapſed into the ignorance and ſuperſtition of Paganiſm; out of which degeneracy, that God hath reſcued us, as we have infinite cauſe to adore his

goodneſs, ſo we have all the reaſon in the world to dread and deteſt a return into this ſpiritual Egypt, this houſe of darkneſs and bondage, and the bringing of our necks again under *that yoke, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.*

So that you ſee that there are ſtill very conſiderable effects of the Chriſtian religion in the world, yea and I doubt not but in thoſe places where it is moſt corrupted and degenerated; becauſe they ſtill retain the eſſential doctrines of Chriſtianity, which have not quite loſt their force, notwithſtanding the many errors and corruptions that are mixed with them. And as God knows, and every man ſees it, that the generality of Chriſtians are very bad, notwithſtanding all the influence of that excellent religion which they profeſs; yet I think it is very evident, men would be much worſe without it. For though very many who have entertained the principles of Chriſtianity are very wicked in their lives; yet many are otherwiſe: and thoſe that are bad have this advantage by their religion, that it is in its nature apt to reduce and recover men from a wicked courſe, and ſometimes does: whereas the caſe of thoſe perſons would have been deſperate, were it not for thoſe principles of religion which were implanted in them by Chriſtian education; and though they were long ſuppreſs'd, yet did at laſt awaken them to a conſideration of their condition, and proved the happy means of their recovery.

3. I will not deny but there are ſome perſons as bad, nay perhaps worſe, that have been bred up in the Chriſtian religion, than are commonly to be found in the darkneſs of Paganiſm; for the corruption of the beſt things is the worſt, and thoſe who have reſiſted ſo great a light as that of the goſpel is, are like to prove the moſt deſperately wicked of all others. There is nothing that men make worſe uſe of, than of light and liberty, two of the beſt and moſt pleaſant things in the world. Knowledge is many times abuſed to the worſt purpoſe, and liberty into licentiouſneſs and ſedition; and yet no man for all that thinks ignorance deſirable, or would wiſh a perpe-

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tual night and darkneſs to the world; and conclude from the inconveniencies of abuſed liberty, that the beſt ſtate of things would be, that the generality of mankind ſhould be all ſlaves to a few, and be perpetually chained to the oar, or condemned to the mines.

There are many times as bad conſequences of good things, as of bad: but yet there is a great difference between good and bad for all that. As knowledge and liberty, ſo likewiſe the Chriſtian religion is a great happineſs to the world in general, though ſome are ſo unhappy as to be the worſe for it; not becauſe religion is bad, but becauſe they are ſo.

4. If religion be a matter of mens free choice, it is not to be expected that it ſhould neceſſarily and conſtantly have its effects upon men; for it works upon us not by way of force or natural neceſſity, but of moral perſuaſion. If religion, and the grace of God which goes along with it, did force men to be good and virtuous, and no man could be ſo unleſs he were thus violently forced, then it would be no virtue in any man to be good, nor any crime and fault to be otherwiſe. For then the reaſon why ſome men were good, would be becauſe they could not help it; and others bad, becauſe the grace of God did not make them good whether they would or not.

But religion does not thus work upon men. It directs men to their duty by the ſhorteſt and plaineſt precepts of a good life; it perſuades men to the obedience of theſe precepts, by the promiſes of eternal happineſs, and the threatenings of eternal miſery in caſe of obſtinate diſobedience; it offers us the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, to help our weakneſs, and enable us to that, for which we are not ſufficient of ourſelves: But there is nothing of violence or neceſſity in all this. After all, men may diſobey theſe precepts, and not be perſuaded by theſe arguments, may not make uſe of this grace which God offers, may *quench and reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt*, and *reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves*. And the caſe being thus, it is no wonder, if the temptations of this preſent world prevail upon the vicious inclinations of men

againſt their duty, and their true intereſt; and conſequently, if the motives and arguments of the Chriſtian religion have not a conſtant and certain effect upon a great part of mankind. Not but that Chriſtianity is apt to bring men to goodneſs; but ſome are ſo obſtinately bad, as not to be wrought upon by the moſt powerful conſiderations it can offer to them.

5. It cannot be denied, but that Chriſtianity is as well framed to make men good, as any religion can be imagined to be; and therefore wherever the fault be, it cannot be in the Chriſtian religion, that we are not good. So that the bad lives of Chriſtians are no ſufficient objection either againſt the truth or goodneſs of the Chriſtian doctrine. Beſides the confirmation that was given to it by miracles, the excellency of the doctrine, and its proper tendency to make men holy and virtuous, are a plain evidence of its divine and heavenly original. And ſurely the goodneſs of any religion conſiſts in the ſufficiency of its precepts to direct men to their duty; in the force of its arguments to perſuade men to it; and the ſuitableneſs of its aids and helps to enable us to the diſcharge and performance of it. And all thoſe advantages the Chriſtian religion hath above any religion or inſtitution that ever was in the world. The reaſonable and plain rules of a good life are no where ſo perfectly collected, as in the diſcourſes of our bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles. No religion ever gave men ſo full aſſurance of the mighty rewards and puniſhments of another world; nor ſuch gracious promiſes of divine aſſiſtance, and ſuch evidence of it, eſpecially in the piety, and virtue, and patience, and ſelf-denial of the primitive Chriſtians, as the doctrine of God our Saviour hath done, *which teacheth men to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world, in contemplation of the bleſſed hope and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt; who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

6. And

6. And *lastly*, after all that hath or can be said, it must be acknowledged, and ought sadly to be lamented by us, that the wicked lives of Christians are a marvellous scandal and reproach to our holy religion, and a great obstacle to the spreading of it in the world, and a real objection against it to prejudiced persons, with whom it doth justly bring into doubt the goodness and efficacy of the institution itself, to see how little effect it hath upon the hearts and lives of men. It is hard for a man to maintain the reputation of an excellent master in any kind, when all the world sees that most of his scholars prove dunces. Whatever commendation may be given to any art or science, men will question the truth and reality of it, when they see the greatest part of those who profess it, not able to do any thing answerable to it. The Christian religion pretends to be an art of serving God more decently and devoutly, and of living better than other men; but if it be so, why do not the professors of this excellent religion shew the force and virtue of it in their lives? And though I have sufficiently shewn, that this is not enough to overthrow the truth, and disparage the excellency of the Christian doctrine; yet it will certainly go a great way with prejudiced persons, and it cannot be expected otherwise.

So that we have infinite reason to be ashamed, that there is so plain a contrariety between the laws of Christianity, and the lives of the greatest part of Christians; so notorious and palpable a difference between the religion that is in the Bible, and that which is to be seen and read in the conversations of men.

Who that looks upon the manners of the present age, could believe, (if he did not know it) that the holy and pure doctrine of the Christian religion had ever been so much as heard, much less pretended to be entertained and believed among us? Nay among those who seem to make a more serious profession of religion, when we consider how strangely they allow themselves in malice and envy, in passion and anger, and uncharitable censures, and evil speaking, in fierce contentions and animosities; who would believe that the great instrument of these mens

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religion, I mean the holy Bible, by which they profess to regulate and govern their lives, were full of plain and strict precepts of love and kindness, of charity and peace, and did a hundred times with all imaginable severity, and under pain of forfeiting the kingdom of God, forbid malice, and envy, and revenge, and evil speaking, and rash and uncharitable censures, and tell us so plainly that the Christian religion obligeth men *to put off all these*; and that *if any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain?* Do men read and hear these things every day, and profess to believe them to be the truths of God, and yet live as if they were verily persuaded they were false? What can we conclude from hence, but either that this is not Christianity, or the greatest part of us are no Christians.

So that if one of the Apostles or primitive Christians should rise from the dead, and converse among us, how would he wonder to see the face and complexion of Christianity altered from what it was in their days; and, were it not for the name and title which we bear, would sooner guess us to be any thing than Christians.

So that upon the whole matter, there is no way to quit ourselves of this objection, and to wash away the reproach of it, but to mend and reform our lives. Till this be done, it is unavoidable, but the vicious manners of men will affect our religion with obloquy and reproach, and derive an ill conceit and opinion of it into the minds of men. And I cannot see how Christianity can ever gain much ground in the world, till it be better adorned and recommended by the professors of it. Nay, we have just cause to fear, that if God do not raise up some great and eminent instruments to awaken the world out of this stupid lethargy, that Christianity will every day decline, and the world will in a short space be over-run with atheism and infidelity. For vice, and superstition, and enthusiasm, which are the reigning diseases of Christendom, when they have run their course, and finished their circle, do all naturally end, and meet in atheism. And then it will be time for the great

Judge

Judge of the world to appear; and effectually to convince men of that, which they would not be perſuaded to believe by any other means. And of this our Saviour hath given us a terrible and fearful intimation, in that queſtion of his; *When the Son of man comes, ſhall he find faith upon earth?* Our Saviour hath not poſitively affirmed it, and God grant that we may not make it, and find it true.

And thus I have, by God's aſſiſtance, given the beſt ſatisfaction I could, to the moſt material exceptions I have met with againſt our bleſſed Saviour and his religion. The

II. Thing remains briefly to be ſpoken to, *viz.* How happy a thing it is to eſcape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain againſt religion. *Bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* And this will appear if we conſider theſe three or four things:

Firſt, That prejudice does many times ſway and bias men againſt the plaineſt and cleareſt truths. We ſee in daily experience, what a falſe bias prejudice puts upon mens underſtandings. Men that are educated in the groſſeſt errors and ſuperſtitions, how hard it is to convince them that they are in a wrong way! and with what difficulty are they perſuaded of their miſtake! Nay, they have hardly the patience to be told they are in an error, much leſs to conſider what may be offered againſt it. How do the paſſions and luſts of men blind them and lead them aſide from the truth, and incline them to that ſide of the queſtion which is moſt favourable to their luſts and intereſts! How partially do men lean to that part which makes moſt for their advantage, though all the reaſon in the world ly on the other ſide!

Now ignorance and miſtake are a great ſlavery of the underſtanding, if there were no worſe conſequences of our errors: and therefore our Saviour ſays excellently, that the truth makes men free; *Ye ſhall know the truth, and the truth ſhall make you free.*

Secondly, Prejudice does not only bias men againſt the plaineſt truths, but in matters of greateſt concernment, in things that concern the honour of God, and

and the good of others, and our own welfare and happineſs. Prejudices againſt religion occaſion miſtakes of the higheſt nature, and may lead men to ſuperſtition and idolatry, and to all manner of impiety, nay many times to atheiſm and infidelity. The prejudices againſt the doctrine of our Saviour are of another concernment than the prejudices which men have againſt the writers of natural philoſophy or eloquence, or any other human art or ſcience. If a man's prejudice make him err in theſe matters, the thing is of no great moment: But the buſineſs of religion is a matter of the greateſt and weightieſt concernment to mankind.

Thirdly, The conſequences of mens prejudices in theſe things proye many times fatal and deſtructive to them. Men may upon unreaſonable prejudices *reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves*, as it is ſaid of the chief Prieſts and Phariſees among the Jews. Men may oppoſe the truth ſo obſtinately and perverſly, as to be *fighters againſt God*, and to bring certain ruin and *ſwift deſtruction upon themſelves*, both in this world and the other; as the Jews did, who by oppoſing the doctrine of the goſpel, and perſecuting our Saviour and his diſciples, *filled up the meaſure of their ſins, till wrath came upon them to the uttermoſt*. It is eaſy to entertain prejudices againſt religion, and by conſidering only the wrong ſide of things, to fortify our prejudices to ſuch a degree, and entrench ourſelves ſo ſtrongly in our errors, that the plaineſt and moſt convincing truths ſhall not be able to have any acceſs to us, or make any impreſſion upon us: but all this while we do in truth undermine our own happineſs, and are ſecretly working our own ruin; and while we think we are oppoſing an enemy, we are deſtroying ourſelves; for *who hath hardened himſelf againſt God*, and his truth, *and proſpered?* The principles of religion are a firm and immoveable rock, againſt which the more violently we daſh ourſelves, the more miſerably we ſhall be ſplit and ſhattered. Our bleſſed Saviour and his religion have been to many, and are to this day, *a ſtone of ſtumbling, and a rock of offence*;

fence; but he himſelf hath told us what ſhall be the fate of thoſe who are offended at him; *Whoſoever ſhall fall on this ſtone, ſhall be broken; but upon whomſoever it ſhall fall, it ſhall grind him to powder.* And therefore well might he ſay here in the text, *Bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.*

Fourthly, There are but few in compariſon, who have the happineſs to eſcape and overcome the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain againſt religion. Thus to be ſure it was when Chriſtianity firſt appeared in the world: And though among us the great prejudice of education be removed; yet there are ſtill many, who, upon one account or other, are prejudiced againſt religion, at leaſt ſo far, as not to yield to the power of it in their lives. Few men are ſo impartial in conſidering things, as not to be ſwayed by the intereſt of their luſts and paſſions; as to keep the balance of their judgments even, and to ſuffer nothing but truth and reaſon to weigh with them. We generally pretend to be *pilgrims and ſtrangers in the world*, and to be all travelling towards heaven: but few of us have the indifferency of travellers; who are not concerned to find out the faireſt and the eaſieſt way, but to know which is the right way, and to go in it. Thus it ſhould be with us, our end ſhould always be in our eye, and we ſhould chooſe our way only with reſpect to that; not conſidering our inclination ſo much as our deſign; nor chooſing thoſe principles for the government of our lives, which are moſt agreeable to our preſent deſires, but thoſe which will moſt certainly bring us to happineſs at the laſt; and that I am ſure the principles of the Chriſtian religion, firmly believed and practiſed by us, will do.

Let us then be perſuaded by all that hath been ſaid upon this argument, to a firm belief of the Chriſtian doctrine. I hope you are in ſome meaſure ſatisfied, that the objections againſt it are not ſuch, as ought much to move a wiſe and conſiderate man. If we believe that God hath taken ſo much care of man-

mankind, as to make any certain revelation of his will to them, and of the way to eternal happineſs; let us next conſider, whether any religion in the world can come in competition with the Chriſtian, and with half that reaſon pretend to be from God, that Chriſtianity is able to produce for itſelf, whether we conſider the things to be believed, or the duties to be practiſed, or the motives and arguments to the practice of thoſe duties, or the divine confirmation that is given to the whole. And if we be thus perſuaded concerning it, let us reſolve to live up to the laws and rules of this holy religion. Our belief of it ſignifies nothing without the fruits and effects of a good life. And if this were once reſolved upon, the difficulty of believing would ceaſe; for the true reaſon why men are unwilling to believe the truths of the goſpel, is, becauſe they are loth to put them in practice. *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light.* The true ground of moſt mens prejudice againſt the Chriſtian doctrine, is becauſe they have no mind to obey it; and when all is done, the great objection that lies at the bottom of mens minds againſt it, is, that it is an enemy to their luſts, and they cannot profeſs to believe it without condemning themſelves, for not complying with it in their lives and practice.

SER-

SERMON CXX.

Jeſus, the Son of God, proved by his reſurrection.

ROM. i. 4.

And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holineſs, by the reſurrection from the dead.

ST. Paul, in the beginning of this epiſtle (according to his cuſtom in the reſt) ſtiles himſelf an Apoſtle particularly called and ſet apart by God for the preaching of the goſpel; the main ſubject whereof was, *Jeſus Chriſt our Lord*; who as he was, according to his divine nature, *the eternal Son of God*; ſo, according to his human nature, he was not only *the ſon of man*, but alſo *the Son of God. According to the fleſh* (that is, the weakneſs, and frailty, and mortality of his human nature) *he was the ſon of David*, that is, of his poſterity by his mother, who was of that houſe and line. *Made of the ſeed of David, according to the fleſh*, ver. 3. *But according to the Spirt of holineſs*, (that is, in regard of that divine power of the Holy Ghoſt, which was manifeſted in him, eſpecially in his reſurrection from the dead) *he was demonſtrated to be the Son of God*; even according to his human nature; *declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holineſs, by the reſurrection from the dead.*

All the difficulty in the words is concerning the meaning of this phraſe, of Chriſt's being *declared to be the Son of God:* The word is ὁρι θέντος, which moſt frequently in ſcripture does ſignify *predeſtinated, decreed, determined*; but it likewiſe ſignifies, that which is *defined, declared, demonſtrated, put out of all doubt and controverſy.* And in this ſenſe our

translation renders it. As if the Apostle had said, that our Lord Jesus Christ, though according to the frailty and weakness of his human nature, he was of the seed of David; yet in respect of that divine power of the Holy Ghost, which manifested itself in him, especially in his resurrection from the dead, he was *declared to be the Son of God with power*, that is, mightily, powerfully demonstrated to be so; so as to put the matter out of all dispute and controversy.

And therefore, following our own translation, I shall handle the words in this sense, as containing this proposition in them; *That the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, by the Holy Ghost, is a powerful demonstration that he was the Son of God.*

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this proposition to consider these two things:

First, Upon what account Christ, as man, is said to be *the Son of God.*

Secondly, In what sense he is said to be *declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.*

The consideration of these two particulars will fully clear this proposition, and the Apostle's meaning in it.

First, Upon what account Christ, as man, is said to be *the Son of God.* And for our right apprehension of this matter, it is very well worthy our observation, that Christ, as man, is no where in scripture said to be *the Son of God*, but with relation to the divine power of the Holy Ghost, some way or other eminently manifested in him; I say the divine power of the Holy Ghost, as the Lord and giver of life, as he is called in the ancient creeds of the Christian church. For as men are naturally said to be the children of those from whom they receive their life and being; so Christ, as man, is said to be *the Son of God*, because he had life communicated to him, from the Father, by an immediate power of the Spirit of God, or the Holy Ghost; first at his conception, which was by the Holy Ghost. The conception of our blessed Saviour was an immediate act of the power of the Holy Ghost, overshadowing, as the scripture expresseth it, the blessed mother of our Lord. And then at his resur-

reſurrection, when after his death, he was, by the operation of the Holy Ghoſt, raiſed to life again.

Now upon theſe two accounts only, Chriſt, as man, is ſaid in ſcripture to be *the Son of God.* He was really ſo upon account of his conception; but this was ſecret and inviſible: but moſt eminently and remarkably ſo, upon account of his reſurrection, which was open and viſible to all.

1. Upon account of his conception by the power of the Holy Ghoſt: That upon this account he was called *the Son of God*, St. Luke moſt expreſsly tells us, Luke i. 35. where the Angel tells the virgin Mary, that *the Holy Ghoſt ſhould come upon her, and the power of the Higheſt ſhould overſhadow her, and therefore that holy thing which ſhould be born of her, ſhould be called the Son of God.* And this our Saviour means by the Father's ſanctifying him, and ſending him into the world; for which reaſon he ſays he might juſtly call himſelf *the Son of God*, John x. 35, 36. *If he call them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the ſcripture cannot be broken: Say ye of him, whom the Father hath ſanctified, and ſent into the world, Thou blaſphemeſt; becauſe I ſaid, I am the Son of God?* If there had been no other reaſon, this had been ſufficient to have given him the title of *the Son of God*, that he was brought into the world by the ſanctification, or divine power of the Holy Ghoſt.

2. Chriſt is alſo ſaid in ſcripture to be *the Son of God*, and to be declared to be ſo, upon account of his *reſurrection from the dead*, by the power of the Holy Ghoſt. His reſurrection from the dead is here in the text aſcribed to *the Spirit of holineſs*, or the Holy Ghoſt. And ſo in other places of ſcripture, Rom. viii. 11. *If the Spirit of him that raiſed up Jeſus from the dead dwell in you:* And 1 Pet. iii. 18. *Being put to death in the fleſh, but quickened by the Spirit*; that is, he ſuffered in that frail mortal nature which he aſſumed: but was raiſed again by the power of the Holy Ghoſt, of the Spirit of God which reſided in him. And upon this account he is expreſsly ſaid in ſcripture to be *the Son of God.* Pſal. ii. 7. *I will declare the decree; the Lord hath ſaid unto*

me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee; to which perhaps the Apoſtle alludes here in the text, when he ſays, that *Chriſt was decreed to be the Son of God, by his reſurrection from the dead.* To be ſure theſe words, *this day have I begotten thee,* St. Paul expreſsly tells us were accompliſhed in the reſurrection of Chriſt; as if God by raiſing him from the dead, had begotten him, and decreed him to be his Son. Acts xiii. 32, 33. *And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promiſe which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the ſame unto us their children, in that he hath raiſed up Jeſus again; as it is alſo written in the ſecond pſalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

He was *the Son of God* before, as he was conceived by the Holy Ghoſt; but this was ſecret and inviſible, and known only to the mother of our Lord: And therefore God thought fit to give a publick and viſible demonſtration of it, ſo as to put the matter out of all queſtion; he declared him in a powerful manner to be his Son, by giving him a new life after death, by raiſing him from the dead; and by this new and eminent teſtimony given to him, declared him again to be his Son, and confirmed the title which was given him before upon a true, but more ſecret account, of his being conceived by the Holy Ghoſt.

And as our Saviour is ſaid to be *the Son of God* upon this twofold account, of his conception by the Holy Ghoſt, and his reſurrection to life by the Spirit of God: So the ſcripture (which does ſolicitouſly purſue a reſemblance and conformity between Chriſt and Chriſtians) does likewiſe upon a twofold account (anſwerable to our Saviour's birth and reſurrection) call true believers and Chriſtians *the children of God, viz.* Upon account of their regeneration or new birth, by the operation of the Spirit of God; and upon account of their reſurrection to eternal life, by the power of the ſame Spirit.

Upon account of our regeneration, and becoming Chriſtians by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit of God upon our minds, we are ſaid to be the chil-

children of God, as being regenerated and born again by the Holy Spirit of God: And this is our firſt adoption: And for this reaſon the Spirit of God conferred upon Chriſtians at their baptiſm, and dwelling and reſiding in them afterwards, is called *the Spirit of adoption*; Rom. viii. 15. *Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby you cry, Abba Father*; and *Gal.* iv, 5, 6. Believers are ſaid to *receive the adoption of ſons*; *God having ſent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying Abba Father*; that is, all Chriſtians, foraſmuch as they are regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God, and having the Spirit of God dwelling in them, may with confidence call God Father, and look upon themſelves as his children. So the Apoſtle tells us, Rom. viii. 14. *That as many as are led (or acted) by the Spirit of God, are the ſons of God.*

But though we are ſaid to be the children of God upon account of our regeneration, and the Holy Spirit of God dwelling and reſiding in Chriſtians; yet we are eminently ſo, upon account of our reſurrection to eternal life, by the mighty power of God's Spirit. This is our final adoption, and the conſummation of it; and therefore, Rom. viii. 21. this is called *the glorious liberty of the Sons of God*, becauſe by this we are for ever *delivered from the bondage of corruption*; and by way of eminency, *the adoption*, viz. *the redemption of our bodies.*

We are indeed the ſons of God before, upon account of the regenerating and ſanctifying virtue of the Holy Ghoſt; but finally and chiefly upon account of our reſurrection by the power of the divine Spirit. So St. John tells us, that then we ſhall be declared to be the ſons of God, after another manner than we are now: 1 John iii. 1. *Behold what manner of love the Father hath beſtowed upon us, that we ſhould be called the ſons of God. Now we are the ſons of God,* (that is, our adoption is begun in our regeneration and ſanctification) *but it doth not yet appear what we ſhall be*; we ſhall be much more eminently ſo at the reſurrection. *We know, that when he ſhall appear, we ſhall be like him.*

But the most express and remarkable text to this purpose, is, Luke xx. 36. where good men after the resurrection, are for this reason said to be *the children of God*, because they are *the children of the resurrection. But they who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, neither can they dy any more; for they are equal to the Angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.* For this reason they are said to be *the children of God*, because they are raised by him to a new life; and to be made partakers of that which is promised to them, and reserved for them. For all that are raised by the power of God out of the dust of the earth, are not therefore the children of God; but only they that have part in the blessed resurrection to eternal life, and *do inherit the kingdom prepared for them.* Not those who are raised to a perpetual death, and the *resurrection of condemnation.* These are not *the children of God*; but *the children of wrath*, and *the children of perdition.*

But the resurrection of the just, is the full and final declaration, that we are the children of God: not only because we are restored to a new life, but because at the resurrection, we are admitted to the full possession of that blessed inheritance which is purchased for us, and promised to us.

And the Spirit of God which is conferred upon believers in their regeneration, and afterwards dwells and resides in them, is the pledge and earnest of our final adoption, by our resurrection to eternal life; and upon this account and no other, is said to be the earnest of our future inheritance, and the seal and confirmation of it, Eph. i. 13. *In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession*; that is, the Holy Spirit of God, which Christians were made partakers of, upon their sincere belief of the Christian religion, is the seal and earnest of our resurrection to eternal life; as the Apostle plainly tells us, in that remarkable text, Rom. viii. 11. *If the Spirit of him that*

that raiſed up Jeſus from the dead dwell in you, he that raiſed up Chriſt from the dead, ſhall alſo quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

I have been the longer upon this, becauſe it ſerves fully to explain to us thoſe obſcure phraſes of the ſeal and earneſt and firſt fruits of the Spirit, which many have miſtaken to import ſome particular and ſpiritual revelation or impreſſion upon the minds of good men, aſſuring them of their ſalvation. Whereas the Apoſtle intended no more by them, but that the Spirit of God which dwells in believers, enabling them *to mortify the deeds of the fleſh, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit,* is a pledge and earneſt to us of a bleſſed reſurrection to eternal life by the power of the Spirit of God which now dwells in us, and is the ſame Spirit which raiſed up Jeſus from the dead. And in this chapter the Spirit of God is ſaid, ver. 16. *to bear witneſs to our ſpirits,* that is, to aſſure our minds, *that we are the children of God,* that is, that we are his children now, and conſequently heirs of a glorious reſurrection to eternal life: for ſo it follows in the next words, *and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Chriſt; if ſo be that we ſuffer with him, that we may alſo be glorified together.* And this being glorified together with Chriſt at the reſurrection, he calls, ver. 19. *the manifeſtation of the ſons of God.* Thus you ſee how in conformity to the Son of God, our elder brother, we are ſaid to be *the ſons of God,* becauſe we are now regenerated, and ſhall at the laſt day be raiſed up to eternal life, by the power of the Spirit of God. I proceed to the

Second thing I propounded to ſpeak to, for the clearing of theſe words, namely, in what ſenſe Chriſt is ſaid to be *declared* or *demonſtrated to be the Son of God, by his reſurrection from the dead.* By which the Apoſtle means theſe two things:

1. That by his reſurrection from the dead he was approved by God to be the true Meſſias, and vindicated to the world from all ſuſpicion of being a deceiver and impoſtor. And conſequently, in the

2. Place, That hereby God gave teſtimony to the truth and divinity of his doctrine.

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1. By his resurrection from the dead, he was approved by God to be the true Messias, foretold by the Prophets, and expected at that time by the Jews, and sufficiently vindicated to the world to be no deceiver and impostor.

And for our fuller understanding of this, we are to consider these two things:

(1.) What the apprehensions and expectations of the Jews were concerning the Messias. And,

(2.) What the many crimes were which they laid to our Saviour's charge, and for which they condemned him.

(1.) What the apprehensions and expectations of the Jews were concerning the Messias. And it is very plain from the evangelical history, that they generally apprehended these two things of him; That the Messias was to be *the Son of God*, and *the King of Israel*; and therefore that our Saviour, by affirming himself to be the Messias, did call himself *the Son of God*, and *the King of Israel*. John i. 41. Andrew tells his brother Simon, *We have found the Messias*. v. 45. Philip tells Nathanael, *We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the Prophets did write*; that is, the Messias, ver. 49. Nathanael, upon discourse with our Saviour, being convinced that he was the Messias, owns him in these terms, *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel*. John vi. 69. Peter declares his belief that he was the Christ, or the Messias, in these words, *We believe and are sure that thou art the Son of the living God*. This appears likewise from the High-priest's question to him, Matth. xxvi. 63. *Art thou the Christ* (that is, the Messias) *the Son of the living God?* or, as it is in St. Mark, *the Son of the blessed*; compared with Pilate's question, *Art thou the King of the Jews?* And when he was upon the cross, some reviled him under the notion of *the Son of God*, Matth xxvii. 40. *If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross:* others under the notion of *the King of Israel*, ver. 42. *If he be the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross.* From all which it is plain that the Jews expected and believed, that the true Messias was to be *the Son of God*, and *the King of Israel*;

Iſrael; and whoever was not ſo, was a deceiver and impoſtor. But our Saviour affirmed himſelf to be the true Meſſias, and *the Son of God.* Now God by raiſing him from the dead, did abundantly vindicate him to the world, from all ſuſpicion of impoſture; and gave teſtimony to him, that he was all that he ſaid of himſelf, *viz. the true Meſſias,* and *the Son of God.*

Which will further appear, if we conſider (*2dly,*) What were the crimes which the Jews laid to our Saviour's charge, and for which they condemned him; and they were mainly theſe two, that by giving himſelf to be the Meſſias, he made himſelf *King of Iſrael,* and *the Son of God.* Of the firſt of theſe they accuſed him to Pilate, hoping by this accuſation to make him guilty of ſedition againſt the Roman government, for ſaying, that he was *the King of Iſrael.* Of the other they accuſed him to the chief Prieſts, as being guilty of blaſphemy, in that not being the Meſſias, he called himſelf *the Son of God.* And upon this they laid the main ſtreſs, as being a thing that would condemn him by their law. They charged him with this in his lifetime, as appears by thoſe words of our Saviour, John x. 36. *Say ye of him whom the Father hath ſanctified, and ſent into the world, Thou blaſphemeſt, becauſe I ſaid I am the Son of God?* And when he was arraigned before the chief Prieſts, they accuſed him of this, and he owning this charge, *that he called himſelf the Son of God,* upon this they judged him guilty of death. Matth. xxvi. 65, 66. *Then the High-prieſt rent his clothes, and ſaid, he hath ſpoken blaſphemy; what further need have we of witneſſes? behold, now ye have heard his blaſphemy. What think ye? They anſwered, he is guilty of death.* And when Pilate told them, that he found no fault in him, they ſtill inſtance in this as his crime, John xix. 7. *We have a law, and by our law he ought to dy, becauſe he hath made himſelf the Son of God.*

Now this being the crime which was charged upon him, and for which he was crucified, and put to death; God, by raiſing him from the dead, and taking him

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up into heaven, gave teſtimony to him, that he was no impoſtor, and that he did not vainly arrogate to himſelf to be the Meſſias and *the Son of God*. God, by raiſing him from the dead by the power of the Holy Ghoſt, gave a mighty demonſtration to him, that he was *the Son of God*. For which reaſon he is ſaid by the Apoſtle, 1 Tim. iii. 16. to be *juſtified by the Spirit*. The Spirit gave teſtimony to him at his baptiſm, and by the mighty works that appeared in him in his lifetime; but he was moſt eminently and remarkably *juſtified by the Holy Ghoſt, by his reſurrection from the dead*; God hereby bearing him witneſs, that he was unjuſtly condemned, and that he aſſumed nothing to himſelf, but what of right did belong to him, when he ſaid he was the Meſſias, and *the Son of God*. For how could a man that was condemned to dy for calling himſelf *the Son of God*, be more remarkably vindicated, and more clearly proved to be ſo, than by being raiſed from the dead, by the power of God?

And, 2*dly*, God did conſequently hereby give teſtimony to the truth and divinity of our Saviour's doctrine. Being proved by his reſurrection to be *the Son of God*, this proved him to be a teacher ſent by him, and what he declared to the world was the mind and will of God. For this none was more likely to know, and to report truly to mankind, than *the Son of God*, who came from *the boſom of the Father*. And becauſe the reſurrection of Chriſt is ſo great a teſtimony to the truth of his doctrine, hence it is that St. Paul tells us, that the belief of this one article of Chriſt's reſurrection is ſufficient to a man's ſalvation, Rom. x. 9. *If thou ſhalt confeſs with thy mouth the Lord Jeſus, and ſhalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raiſed him from the dead, thou ſhalt be ſaved*. The reaſon is plain, becauſe the reſurrection of Chriſt confirmed the truth and divinity of his doctrine; ſo that the belief of our Saviour's reſurrection does by neceſſary conſequence infer the belief of his whole doctrine. That God raiſed him from the dead, after he was condemned and put to death for calling himſelf *the Son of God*, is a demonſtration that he really was *the Son of God*; and if he was *the Son of God*, the

the doctrine which he taught was true, and from God.

And thus I have ſhewn you, how the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead, is a powerful demonſtration that he was *the Son of God.*

All that remains, is briefly to draw ſome practical inferences from the conſideration of our Saviour's reſurrection.

1. To confirm and eſtabliſh our minds in the belief of the Chriſtian religion, of which the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead is ſo great a confirmation. And therefore I told you that this one article is mentioned by St. Paul as the ſum and abridgment of the Chriſtian faith; *If thou ſhalt confeſs with thy mouth the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and believe in thy heart that God hath raiſed him from the dead, thou ſhalt be ſaved.* The belief of our Saviour's reſurrection doth by neceſſary conſequence infer the belief of his whole doctrine; for he who believes that God raiſed him from the dead, after he was put to death for calling himſelf *the Son of God,* cannot but believe him to be *the Son of God*; and conſequently that the doctrine which he delivered was from God.

2*dly*, The reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead aſſures us of a future judgment, and of the recompences and rewards of another world. That Chriſt was raiſed from the dead, is a demonſtration of another life after this; and no man that believes the immortality of our ſouls, and another life after this, ever doubted of a future judgment; ſo that by the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead, God hath given aſſurance unto all men of a future judgment, and conſequently of the recompences and rewards of another world.

The conſideration whereof ought to have a mighty influence upon us, more eſpecially to theſe *three* purpoſes:

1*ſt*, To raiſe our minds above the preſent enjoyments of this life. Were but men convinced of this great and obvious truth, that there is an infinite difference between time and eternity, between a few days and everlaſting ages; would we but ſometimes repreſent to ourſelves, what thoughts and apprehenſions dying men have of this world, how vain and

empty

empty a thing it appears to them; how like a pageant and ſhadow it looks, as it paſſeth away from them; methinks none of theſe things could be a ſufficient temptation to any man to forget God and his ſoul; but notwithſtanding all the preſent delights, and allurements of ſenſe, we ſhould be ſtrongly intent upon the concernments of another world, and almoſt wholly taken up with the thoughts of the vaſt eternity which we are ready to enter into. For what is there in this world, this vaſt and howling wilderneſs, this rude and barbarous country which we are but to paſs through, which ſhould detain and entangle our affections, and take off our thoughts from our everlaſting habitation, from that *better*, and *that heavenly country*, where we hope to live and to be happy for ever?

2*dly*, The conſideration of the rewards of another world ſhould comfort and ſupport us under the troubles and afflictions of this world. The hopes of a bleſſed reſurrection are a very proper conſideration to bear us up under the evils and preſſures of this life. If we hope for ſo great a happineſs hereafter, we may be contented to bear ſome afflictions in this world, becauſe the bleſſedneſs which we expect will ſo abundantly recompenſe and outweigh our preſent ſufferings. So the Apoſtle aſſures us, Rom. viii. 18. *We know that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall be revealed in us.* The conſideration whereof was that which made the primitive Chriſtians to triumph in their ſufferings, and in the midſt of all their tribulations to *rejoice in the hopes of the glory of God*; becauſe their ſufferings did really prepare and make way for their glory. So the ſame Apoſtle tells us, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. *Our light afflictions which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; whilſt we look not at the things which are ſeen; for the things which are ſeen are temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are eternal.*

3*dly*, and *laſtly*, The aſſurance of our future reward is a mighty encouragement to obedience and a holy life. What greater encouragement can we have than

than this, that all the good which we do in this world will accompany us into the other? *That when we reſt from our labours, our works will follow us?* That when we ſhall be ſtript of other things, and parted from them, theſe will ſtill remain with us, and bear us company; our riches and honours, our ſenſual pleaſures and enjoyments will all take their leave of us, when we leave this world; nay, many times they do not accompany us ſo far as the grave, but take occaſion to forſake us, when we have the greateſt need and uſe of them; but piety and virtue are *that better part which cannot be taken from us.* All the good actions which we do in this world will go along with us into the other, and through the merits of our Redeemer procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful God, a glorious and eternal reward; not according to the meanneſs of our ſervices, but according to the bounty of his mind, and the vaſtneſs of his treaſures and eſtate.

Now what an encouragement is this to holineſs and obedience, to conſider that it will all be our own another day; to be aſſured that whoever ſerves God faithfully, and does ſuffer for him patiently, does lay up ſo much treaſure for himſelf in another world, and provides laſting comforts for himſelf, and faithful and conſtant companions, that will never leave him nor forſake him!

Let us then do all the good we can, while we have opportunity, and ſerve God with all our might, knowing that no good action that we do ſhall be loſt and fall to the ground, that every grace and virtue that we exerciſe in this life, and every degree of them, *ſhall receive their full recompence at the reſurrection of the juſt.*

How ſhould this inſpire us with reſolution and zeal and induſtry in the ſervice of God, to have ſuch a reward continually in our eye! how ſhould it tempt us to our duty, to have *a crown* and *a kingdom* offered to us, *joys unſpeakable and full of glory, ſuch things as eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man!* And *ſuch are*

the things which God hath laid up for them who love him heartily, and ſerve him faithfully in this world.

SERMON CXXI.

The danger of apoſtacy from Chriſtianity.

HEB. vi. 4, 5, 6.

For it is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlightened, and have taſted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have taſted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they ſhall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; ſeeing they crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame.

THeſe words are full of difficulties, and the miſunderſtanding of them hath not only been an occaſion of a great deal of trouble, and even deſpair to particular perſons, but one of the chief reaſons why the church of Rome did for a long time reject the authority of this book; which by the way I cannot but take notice of as a demonſtrative inſtance both of the fallible judgment of that church, and of the fallibility of oral tradition; for St. Jerom more than once expreſly tells us, "That in "his time (which was about 400 years after Chriſt) "the church of Rome did not receive this epiſtle for ca-"nonical:" But it is plain, that ſince that time, whether moved by the evidence of the thing, or (which is more probable) by the conſent and authority of other churches, they have received it, and do at this day acknowledge it for canonical: from whence one of theſe two things will neceſſarily follow; either that they were in an error for 400 years together, while they rejected it; or that they have ſince erred for a longer time in receiving it. One of theſe is unavoid-

able;

able; for if the book be canonical now, it was ſo from the beginning; for Bellarmine himſelf confeſſeth (and if he had not confeſſed it, it is nevertheleſs true and certain) that the church cannot make a book canonical, which was not ſo before; if it was not canonical at firſt, it cannot be made ſo afterward: ſo that let them chooſe which part they will, it is evident, beyond all denial, that the church of Rome hath actually erred in her judgment concerning the authority of this book; and one error of this kind is enough to deſtroy her infallibility, there being no greater evidence that a church is not infallible, than if it plainly appear that ſhe hath been deceived.

And this is alſo a convincing inſtance of the fallibility of oral tradition. For if that be infallible in delivering down to us the canonical books of ſcripture, it neceſſarily follows, that whatever books were delivered down to us for canonical in one age, muſt have been ſo in all ages; and whatever was rejected in any age, muſt always have been rejected: but we plainly ſee the contrary, from the inſtance of this epiſtle, concerning which the church of Rome (which pretends to be the great and faithful preſerver of tradition) hath in ſeveral ages delivered ſeveral things. This is a peremptory inſtance both of the fallibility of the Roman church, and of her oral tradition.

Having obſerved this by the way, which I could not well paſs by upon ſo fair an occaſion, I ſhall betake myſelf to the explication of theſe words; towards which it will be no ſmall advantage to conſider the particular phraſes and expreſſions in the text. *It is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlightened*; that is, were ſolemnly admitted into the church by baptiſm, and embraced the profeſſion of Chriſtianity. Nothing was more frequent among the ancients, than to call baptiſm φωτισμὸν, *illumination*; and thoſe who were baptiſed were called φωτιζόμενοι, *enlightened perſons*, becauſe of that divine illumination which was conveyed to the minds of men by the knowledge of Chriſtianity, the doctrine whereof they made profeſſion of at their baptiſm: And therefore

Justin Martyr tells us, "*that by calling upon God the Father, and the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the name of the Holy Ghost,* ὁ φωτιζόμενος λοῦεται, *the enlightened person is washed*; and again more expressly, Καλεῖται δὲ τοῦτο λουτρὸν φωτισμός, *this laver* (speaking of baptism) *is called illumination.* And St. Cyprian gives us the reason; because by virtue of baptism *in expiatum pectus ac purum desuper se lumen infundit, Light is infused from above into the purified soul.* And that this expression is so to be understood here in the text, as also chap. x. 32. the Syriac and Ethiopic give us good ground to believe; for they render the text thus, *It is impossible for those who have been once baptised, and have tasted of the heavenly gift.* And at the 10th chap. ver. 32. which we translate, *But call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions*; that is, call to mind the former days, in which after by baptism ye had publickly embraced the profession of Christianity, ye were upon that account exposed to many grievous sufferings and persecutions. So that I think there can be no great doubt, but, by *those that were once enlightened,* the Apostle means *those that were baptised.*

To proceed then, *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost*; these two expressions seem to denote the spiritual benefits and graces of the Holy Ghost conferred upon Christians by baptism; particularly regeneration, which is the proper work of the Holy Ghost, and justification and remission of sins. So we find faith, whereby we are justified, called the gift of God, Eph. ii. 8. *Faith is the gift of God*; and our justification is called a gift, and a free gift, five several times, in one chapter, Rom. v. 15, 16, 17, 18. *But not as the offence, so also is the free gift; for if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many*; and what this free gift is, he tells us in the next words, *viz.* justification, or remission of sins, ver 16. *And not as it was*

was by one that ſinned, ſo is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences unto juſtification. For if by one man's offence, death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteouſneſs, ſhall reign in life by one, Jeſus Chriſt. Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation: even ſo by the righteouſneſs of one, the free gift came upon all men unto juſtification of life. So that by the heavenly gift, I underſtand remiſſion of ſins; and by being *made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt*, the ſanctifying power and efficacy of God's Spirit.

And have taſted the good word of God; that is, entertained the goſpel, which is here called *the good word of God*, by reaſon of the gracious promiſes contained in it, particularly the promiſes of eternal life and happineſs.

And the powers of the world to come, δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, the powers of the goſpel age; that is, the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghoſt which were beſtowed upon men, in order to the propagation of the goſpel. And that this is the true meaning of this phraſe, will, I think, be very plain to any one who ſhall but conſider, that the word δυνάμεις is generally in ſcripture uſed for miraculous powers and operations; and particularly to expreſs the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, which were beſtowed upon the Apoſtles and firſt Chriſtians; (I need not cite the particular texts for the proof this, they are ſo many and ſo well known;) and then if we conſider farther, that the times of the goſpel, the days of the Meſſias, are frequently called by the Jews *ſeculum futurum, the age to come.* And indeed this is the very phraſe uſed by the LXX concerning our Saviour, Iſa. ix. 6. where he is called according to our tranſlation, *The everlaſting Father*, but according to that of the LXX, πατὴρ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, *The Father of the future age.* And this very phraſe is uſed once more in this epiſtle to the Hebrews, chap. ii. 5. *For unto the Angels hath he not put in ſubjection the world to come, whereof we now ſpeak.*

He had said before, that the law was given by Angels, ver. 2. *if the word spoken by angels was stedfast*; but the dispensation of the gospel, which he calls *the world to come*, or the future age, was not committed to them, this was administred by the *Son of God*; *Unto the Angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come.* And it is observable, that this phrase is only used in this epistle to the Hebrews, because the Jews very well understood the meaning of it, being that whereby they commonly expressed the times of the gospel, according to that ancient tradition of the house of Elias, which distributed the duration of the world into three αἰῶνες, or ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the Messias, which they called the *seculum futurum*, or *the age to come*; and which is likewise in scripture called, *the last days*, or *times*, and the *conclusion of the ages*. Concerning which it was particularly prophesied, that the Holy Ghost should be poured forth upon men in miraculous gifts and powers. And to this very purpose the Prophet Joel is cited by St. Peter, Acts ii. 16, 17. *This is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass in the last days, (saith God) I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy*, &c. From all which it is very evident, that by *tasting of the powers of the world to come*, is meant being partakers of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were poured forth in the gospel age, by the Jews commonly called *the world to come.*

If they shall fall away; that is, if after all this, they shall apostatize from this profession, out of love to this present world, or from the fear of persecutions and sufferings.

It is impossible to renew them again to repentance; that is, it is a thing very difficult, hardly to be hoped for, that such wilful and notorious apostates should be restored again by repentance. For the word ἀδύνατον, which we translate *impossible*, is not always to be taken in the strictest sense, for that which absolutely cannot be; but many times for that which is so very difficult that it seems next to an impossibility.

bility. So our Saviour, that which in one place he calls *exceeding hard*; viz. *for a rich man to enter into the kindom of heaven*, he aftewards calls *impoſſible with men*; and ſo here I underſtand the Apoſtle, that thoſe who apoſtatize from Chriſtianity, after baptiſm and the benefits of it, it is *exceeding hard to recover them again to repentance*: This phraſe, πάλιν ἀνανεάζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν, to *renew them again to repentance*, ſome underſtand of reſtoring them again to the peace and communion of the church, by a courſe of penance, ſuch as was preſcribed in the ancient church to great offenders; and then they underſtand by ἀδύνατον, not a *natural*, but a *moral impoſſibility*; that which cannot be done according to the orders and conſtitutions of the church; that is, the church did refuſe to admit apoſtates, and ſome other great offenders, as murderers and adulterers, to a courſe of penance, in order to their reconciliation with the church: This Tertullian tells us was the ſtrictneſs of the church in his time, *Neque idololatriæ, neque ſanguini pax ab eccleſia redditur*; they admitted neither idolaters, nor murderers, to the reconciliation of the church. Though they were never ſo penitent, and ſhed never ſo many tears, yet he ſays they were *jejuna pacis lachryma*, their tears were in vain, to reconcile them to the peace and communion of the church. He ſays indeed they did not abſolutely pronounce their caſe deſperate in reſpect of God's pardon and forgiveneſs; *ſed de venia Deo reſervamus*, for that they referred them to God: but they were never to be admitted again into the church; ſo ſtrict were many churches, and that upon the authority of this text; though the church of Rome was more moderate in this matter, and for that reaſon called the authority of this book in queſtion.

But I ſee no reaſon why theſe words ſhould primarily be underſtood of reſtoring men to the communion of the church by penance: but they ſeem to be meant of reſtoring men to the favour of God by repentance; of which indeed their being reſtored to the communion of the church was a good ſign. This the Apoſtle ſays was very difficult, for thoſe who after baptiſm,

baptiſm, and the ſeveral benefits of it, did apoſtatize from Chriſtianity, *to be recovered again to repentance.*

Seeing they crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame. This is ſpoken by way of aggravation of the crime of Apoſtacy, that they who fall off from Chriſtianity, in effect, and by interpretation do *crucify the Son of God* over again, and expoſe him to ſhame and reproach, as the Jews did; for by denying and renouncing of him, they declare him to be an impoſtor, and conſequently worthy of that death which he ſuffered, and that ignominy which he was expoſed to; and therefore, in account of God, they are ſaid to do that, which by their actions they do approve; ſo that it is made a crime of the higheſt nature, as if they ſhould *crucify the Son of God*, and uſe him in the moſt ignominious manner, even *tread under foot the Son of God*, as the expreſſion is to the ſame purpoſe, chap. x. 29.

Thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and clearly as I could, to explain to you the true meaning and importance of the ſeveral phraſes and expreſſions in the text; the ſenſe whereof amounts to this, That if thoſe who are baptized, and by baptiſm have received remiſſion of ſins, and do believe the doctrine of the goſpel, and the promiſes of it, and are endowed with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, if ſuch perſons as theſe ſhall after all this apoſtatize from Chriſtianity, it is very hard, and next to an impoſſibility, to imagine how ſuch perſons ſhould recover again by repentance, ſeeing they are guilty of as great a crime, as if in their own perſons they had put to death and ignominiouſly uſed the Son of God, becauſe, by rejecting of him, they declared to the world, that he ſuffered deſervedly.

Having thus explained the words, in order to the further vindication of them from the miſtakes and miſapprehenſions which have been about them, I ſhall endeavour to make out theſe five things:

1ſt, That the ſin here mentioned is not the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt.

2dly,

2*dly*, That the Apoſtle does not declare it to be abſolutely impoſſible, but only that thoſe who are guilty of it, are recovered to repentance with great difficulty.

3*dly*, That it is not a partial apoſtacy from the Chriſtian religion, by any particular vicious practice.

4*thly*, That it is a total apoſtacy from the Chriſtian religion, and more eſpecially to the heathen idolatry, which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of.

5*thly*, The reaſon of the difficulty of the recovery of thoſe who fall into this ſin.

1*ſt*, That the ſin here mentioned is not the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt*, which I have heretofore diſcourſed of, and ſhewn wherein the particular nature of it does conſiſt. There are three things which do remarkably diſtinguiſh the ſin here ſpoken of in the text, from the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt* deſcribed by our Saviour.

1*ſt*, The perſons that are guilty of this ſin here in the text, are evidently ſuch as had embraced Chriſtianity, and had taken upon them the profeſſion of it; whereas thoſe whom our Saviour chargeth with the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt*, are ſuch as conſtantly oppoſed his doctrine, and reſiſted the evidence he offered for it.

2*dly*, The particular nature of the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt* conſiſted in blaſpheming the Spirit whereby our Saviour wrought his miracles, and ſaying he did not do thoſe things by the Spirit of God, but by the aſſiſtance of the devil, in that malicious and unreaſonable imputing of the plain effects of the Holy Ghoſt to the power of the Devil, and conſequently in an obſtinate refuſal, to be convinced by the miracles that he wrought; but here is nothing of all this ſo much as intimated by the Apoſtle in this place.

3*dly*, *The ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt* is declared to be abſolutely *unpardonable both in this world, and in that which is to come.* But this is not declared to be abſolutely unpardonable; which brings me to the

2*d* Thing, namely, That this ſin here ſpoken of by the

the Apoſtle is not ſaid to be abſolutely unpardonable. It is not the *ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt*; and whatever elſe it be, it is not out of the compaſs of God's pardon and forgiveneſs. So our Saviour hath told us, *that all manner of ſin whatſoever that men have committed is capable of pardon, excepting only the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt.* And though the Apoſtle here uſes a very ſevere expreſſion, that *if ſuch perſons fall away, it is impoſſible to renew them again to repentance*; yet I have ſhewn that there is no neceſſity of underſtanding this phraſe in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of the word *impoſſible*; but, as it is elſewhere uſed, for that which is extremely difficult. Nor indeed will our Saviour's declaration, which I mentioned before, that all ſins whatſoever are pardonable, except the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt*, ſuffer us to underſtand theſe words in the moſt rigorous ſenſe.

3*dly*, The ſin here ſpoken of, is not a partial apoſtacy from the Chriſtian religion by any particular vicious practice. Whoſoever lives in the habitual practice of any ſin plainly forbidden by the Chriſtian law, may be ſaid ſo far to have apoſtatiſed from Chriſtianity; but this is not the falling away, which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of. This may be bad enough, and the greater ſins any man who profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian lives in, the more notoriouſly he contradicts his profeſſion, and falls off from Chriſtianity, and the nearer he approaches to the ſin in the text, and the danger there threatned: but yet for all that, this is not that which the Apoſtle ſpeaks of.

4*thly*, But it is a total apoſtacy from the Chriſtian religion, more eſpecially to the heathen idolatry, the renouncing of the true God, and our Saviour, and the worſhip of falſe gods, which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of. And this will be evident if we conſider the occaſion and main ſcope of this epiſtle, and that was to confirm the Jews, who had newly embraced Chriſtianity, in the profeſſion of that religion; and to keep them from apoſtatizing from it, becauſe of the perſecutions and ſufferings which attended that profeſſion. It pleaſed God, when Chriſtianity firſt appeared in the world, to permit the

powers

powers of the world to raiſe a vehement perſecution againſt the profeſſors of it, by reaſon whereof many out of baſe fear did apoſtatize from it, and in teſtimony of their renouncing it, were forced to ſacrifice to the heathen idols. This is that which the Apoſtle endeavours to caution and arm men againſt throughout this epiſtle. Chap. ii. 1. *Therefore we ought to give the more earneſt heed to the things which we have heard, leſt at any time we ſhould fall away:* And chap. iii. 12. it is called *an evil heart of unbelief to apoſtatize from the living God. Take heed, brethren, leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God*; that is, to fall from the worſhip of the true God to idolatry. And chap. x. 23. *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering, not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together*; that is, not declining the aſſemblies of Chriſtians, for fear of perſecution, and ver. 26. it is called a *ſinning wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth*; and ver. 39. *a drawing back to perdition.* And chap. xii. it is called by way of eminency, *the ſin which ſo eaſily beſets*; the ſin which in thoſe times of perſecution, they were ſo liable to.

And I doubt not but this is the ſin which St. John ſpeaks of, and calls *the ſin unto death*, and does not require Chriſtians *to pray for thoſe who fall into it*, with any aſſurance that it ſhall be forgiven; 1 John v. 16. *There is a ſin unto death: I do not ſay that he ſhall pray for it. All unrighteouſneſs is ſin; and there is a ſin not unto death. We know that whoſoever is born of God ſinneth not*; that is, does not fall into the ſin of apoſtacy from Chriſtianity to that of the heathen idolatry: *But he that is begotten of God, keepeth himſelf, and that wicked one toucheth him not.* And then ver. 21. he adds this caution, *Little children keep yourſelves from idols.* Which ſufficiently ſhews what that ſin was which he was ſpeaking of before.

So that this being the ſin which the Apoſtle deſigned to caution men againſt throughout this epiſtle, it is very evident what falling away it is he here ſpeaks of, namely, a total apoſtacy from Chriſtianity, and more eſpecially to the heathen idolatry.

5thly,

5*thly*, We will conſider the reaſon of the difficulty of recovering ſuch perſons by repentance. *If they fall away, it is extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance*; and that for theſe three reaſons:

1. Becauſe of the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of the ſin.

2. Becauſe it renounceth, and caſteth off the means of recovery.

3. Becauſe it is ſo high a provocation of God to withdraw his grace from ſuch perſons.

1. Becauſe of the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of the ſin, both in the nature and circumſtances of it. It is a downright apoſtacy from God, a direct renouncing of him, and rejecting of his truth, after men have owned it, and been inwardly perſwaded and convinced of it; and ſo the Apoſtle expreſſeth it in this epiſtle, calling it an *apoſtacy from the living God, a ſinning wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth*. It hath all the aggravations that a crime is capable of, being againſt the cleareſt light and knowledge, and the fulleſt conviction of a man's mind, concerning the truth and goodneſs of that religion which he renounceth; againſt the greateſt obligations laid upon him by the grace and mercy of the goſpel; after the free pardon of ſins, and the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Spirit received, and a miraculous power conferred for a witneſs and teſtimony to themſelves, of the undoubted truth of that religion which they have embraced. It is the higheſt affront to the Son of God, who revealed this religion to the world, and ſealed it with his blood: and, in effect, an expreſſion of as high malice to the author of this religion, as the Jews were guilty of, when then put him to ſo cruel and ſhameful a death.

Now a ſin of this heinous nature is apt naturally either to plunge men into hardneſs and impenitency, or to drive them to deſpair, and either of theſe conditions are effectual bars to their recovery. And both theſe dangers the Apoſtle warns men of in this epiſtle, chap. iii. 12, 13. *Take heed, brethren, leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to apoſtatize from the living God: but exhort one another daily, whilſt it is called to day, leſt any of you be hardened through the*

the deceitfulneſs of ſin. Or elſe the reflexion upon ſo horrid a crime is apt to drive a man to deſpair; as it did Judas, who, after he had betrayed the Son of God, could find no eaſe but by making away himſelf; the guilt of ſo great a ſin filled him with ſuch terrors, that he was glad to fly to death for refuge, and to lay violent hands upon himſelf. And this likewiſe was the caſe of Spira, whoſe apoſtacy, though it was not total from the Chriſtian religion, but only from the purity and reformation of it, brought him to that deſperation of mind which was a kind of hell upon earth. And of this danger likewiſe the Apoſtle admoniſheth, chap. xii. 15. *Looking diligently, leſt any man fail of the grace of God,* (or as it is in our margin, *leſt any man fall from the grace of God*) *leſt any root of bitterneſs ſpringing up trouble you*; and then he compares the caſe of ſuch perſons to Eſau, who when he had renounced his birthright, to which the bleſſing was annexed, was afterwards, when he would have inherited the bleſſing, rejected, and *found no place for repentance, though he ſought it carefully with tears.*

2*dly*, Thoſe who are guilty of this ſin, do renounce and caſt off the means of their recovery; and therefore it becomes extremely difficult *to renew them again to repentance.* They reject the goſpel, which affords the beſt arguments and means to repentance, and renounce the only way of pardon and forgiveneſs. And certainly, that man is in a very ſad and deſperate condition, the very nature of whoſe diſeaſe is to reject the remedy that ſhould cure him. And this the Apoſtle tells us, was the condition of thoſe who apoſtatized from the goſpel, chap. x. 26, 27. *For if we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation which ſhall devour the adverſaries.* The great ſacrifice and propitiation for ſin was the Son of God, and they who renounce him, what way of expiation can they hope for afterward? what can they expect but to fall into his

For we may easily imagine, that men might be convinced of the truth and goodness of the Christian doctrine, and in good earnest embrace the profession of it, and yet not be so perfectly weaned from the world, and so firmly rooted and established in that persuasion, as when it came to the trial, to be able to quit all for it, and to bear up against all the terrors and assaults of persecution; so that they might be real Christians and no hypocrites, though they were not so perfectly established and confirmed, and so sincerely resolved as many others. They were not like St. Paul, and those tried persons whom he speaks of, Rom. viii. 35, 37. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors.* (They had been tried by all these, and yet had held out.) Upon which he breaks out into those triumphant expressions; *I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor Angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* They might not (I say) be like those: and yet for all that be real in their profession of Christianity, and no hypocrites.

In short, I take them to be such as our Saviour describes him to be, *who received the seed into stony places*, namely, *he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.* This is no description of a hypocrite; but of one that was real, as far as he went (for he is said *to receive the word with joy*) but was not well rooted, and come to such a confirmed state, as resolutely to withstand the assaults of persecution.

So that though we have truly embraced Christianity, and are in a good degree sincere in the profession of it, yet there is great reason why we should neither be *secure nor confident in ourselves*. Not *secure*, because there is great danger that our resolutions may be born

down

down one time or other by the assaults of temptation, if we be not continually vigilant, and upon our guard. Not *confident in ourselves*, because *we stand by faith, and faith is the gift of God; therefore as the Apostle infers, we should not be high-minded, but fear.* Men may have gone a great way in Christianity, and have been sincere in the profession of it; and yet afterwards may apostatize in the foulest manner, not only fall off to a vicious life, but even desert the profession of their religion. I would to God the experience of the world did not give us too much reason to believe the possibility of this. When we see so many revolt from the profession of the reformed religion, to the corruptions and superstitions of Rome; and others from a religious and sober life, to plunge themselves into all kind of lewdness and debauchery, and, it is to be feared, into atheism and infidelity; can we doubt any longer whether it be possible for Christians to fall away? I wish we were as certain of the possibility of their recovery, as we are of their falling, and that we had as many examples of the one as of the other.

Let us then be very vigilant over ourselves, and according to the Apostle's exhortation, 2 Pet. iii. 17. *Seeing we know these things before, beware, lest we also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from our own stedfastness.*

2*dly*, This shews us how great an aggravation it is, for men to sin against the means of knowledge which the gospel affords, and the mercies which it offers unto them. That which aggravated the sin of these persons was, that after they *were once enlightened*, that is, at their baptism were instructed in the Christian doctrine, the clearest and most perfect revelation that ever was made of God's will to mankind, that after they were *justified freely by God's grace*, and had received remission of sins, and had many other benefits conferred upon them; that after all this, they should fall off from this holy religion. This was that which did so heighten and inflame their guilt, and made their case so near desperate. The two great aggravations of crimes are wilfulness

and ingratitude; if a crime be wilfully committed, and committed against one that hath obliged us by the greatest favours and benefits. Now he commits a fault wilfully, who does it against the clear knowledge of his duty. Ignorance excuseth; for so far as a man is ignorant of the evil he does, so far the action is involuntary; but knowledge makes it to be a wilful fault. And this is a more peculiar aggravation of the sins of Christians, because God hath afforded to them the greatest means and opportunities of knowledge. That revelation which God hath made of his will to the world by our blessed Saviour, is the clearest light that ever mankind had, and the mercies which the gospel brings are the greatest that ever were offered to the sons of men; the free pardon and remission of all our sins, and the assistance of God's grace and Holy Spirit, to help the weakness of our nature, and enable us to do what God requires of us. So that we who sin after baptism, after the knowledge of Christianity, and those great blessings which the gospel bestows on mankind, are of all persons in the world the most inexcusable. The sins of Heathens bear no proportion to ours, because they never enjoyed those means of knowledge, never had those blessings conferred upon them, which Christians are partakers of; so that we may apply to ourselves those severe words of the Apostle in this epistle, *how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?* Hear how our Saviour aggravates the faults of men upon this account, of the wilfulness of them, and their being committed against the express knowledge of God's will: Luke xii. 47, 48. *The servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* The means and mercies of the gospel are so many talents committed to our trust, of the neglect whereof a severe account will be taken at the day of judgment. If we be wilful offenders, there is no excuse for us, and

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little hopes of pardon. *If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth,* (says the Apostle in this epistle) *there remains no more sacrifice for sin.* I know the Apostle speaks this particularly the sin of apostacy from Christianity; but it is in proportion true of all other sins, which those who have received the knowledge of the truth are guilty of. They who, after they have entertained Christianity, and made some progress in it, and been in some measure reformed by it, do again relapse into any vicious course, do thereby render their condition very dangerous. So St. Peter tells us, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. *If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again intangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them, not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.* Therefore we may do well to consider seriously what we do, when, under the means and opportunities of knowledge which the gospel affords us, and the inestimable blessings and favours which it confers upon us, we live in any wicked and vicious course. Our sins are not of a common rate, when they have so much of wilfulness and unworthiness in them. If men shall be severely punished for living against the light of nature; what vengeance shall be poured on those who offend against the glorious light of the gospel? *This is the condemnation that light is come,* &c.

3*dly*, The consideration of what hath been said is matter of comfort to those, who upon every failing and infirmity are afraid they have committed the unpardonable sin, and that it is impossible for them to be restored by repentance. There are many, who being of a dark and melancholy temper, are apt to represent things worse to themselves than there is reason for, and do many times fancy themselves guilty of great crimes, in the doing or neglecting of those things which in their nature are indifferent, and are apt to aggravate

gravate and blow up every little infirmity into an unpardonable sin. Most men are apt to extenuate their sins, and not to be sensible enough of the evil and heinousness of them; but it is the peculiar infelicity of melancholy persons to look upon their faults as blacker and greater than in truth they are; and whatsoever they hear and read in scripture, that is spoken against the grossest and most enormous offenders, they apply to themselves; and when they hear of the *sin against the Holy Ghost, and the sin unto death*, or read this text which I am now treating of, they presently conclude that they are guilty of these sins, and that this is a description of their case. Whereas *the sin against the Holy Ghost* is of that nature, that probably none but those that saw our Saviour's miracles are capable of committing it; and excepting that, there is no sin whatsoever that is unpardonable. As for *the sin unto death*, and that here spoken of in the text, I have shewn that they are a total apostacy from the Christian religion, more especially to the heathen idolatry; which these persons I am speaking of, have no reason to imagine themselves guilty of. And though great and notorious crimes committed by Christians may come near to this, and it may be very hard for those who are guilty of them, to recover themselves again to repentance; yet to be sure, for the common frailties and infirmities of human nature, there is an open way of pardon in the gospel, and they are many times forgiven to us upon a general repentance; so that upon account of these, which is commonly the case of the persons I am speaking of, there is not the least ground of despair; and though it be hard many times for such persons to receive comfort, yet it is easy to give it, and that upon sure grounds, and as clear evidence of scripture, as there is for any thing; so that the first thing that such persons, who are so apt to judge thus hardly of themselves, are to be convinced of (if possible) is this, that they ought rather to trust the judgment of others concerning themselves, than their own imagination, which is so distempered, that it cannot make a true representation of things.

things. I know that where melancholy does mightily prevail, it is hard to perſuade people of this: but till they be perſuaded of it, I am ſure all the reaſon in the world will ſignify nothing to them.

4thly, This ſhould make men afraid of great and preſumptuous ſins, which come near apoſtacy from Chriſtianity; ſuch as deliberate murder, adultery, groſs fraud and oppreſſion, or notorious and habitual intemperance. For what great difference is there, whether men renounce Chriſtianity, or profeſſing to believe it, *do in their works deny it?* Some of theſe ſins which I have mentioned, particularly murder and adultery, were ranked in the ſame degree with apoſtacy by the ancient church; and ſo ſevere was the diſcipline of many churches, that perſons guilty of theſe crimes were never admitted to the peace and communion of the church again, whatever teſtimony they gave of their repentance. I will not ſay but this was too rigorous; but this ſhews how inconſiſtent with Chriſtianity theſe crimes, and others of the like degree of heinouſneſs, were in thoſe days thought to be. They did not indeed, as Tertullian tells us, think ſuch perſons abſolutely incapable of the mercy of God; but after ſuch a fall, ſo notorious a contradiction to their Chriſtian profeſſion, they thought it unfit afterwards that they ſhould ever be reckoned in the number of Chriſtians.

5thly, It may be uſeful for us upon this occaſion to reflect a little upon the ancient diſcipline of the church, which in ſome places, (as I have told you) was ſo ſevere, as in caſe of ſome great crimes after baptiſm, as apoſtacy to the heathen idolatry, murder and adultery, never to admit thoſe that were guilty of them, to the peace and communion of the church; but all churches were ſo ſtrict, as not to admit thoſe who fell after baptiſm into great and notorious crimes, to reconciliation with the church, but after a long and tedious courſe of penance, after the greateſt and moſt publick teſtimonies of ſorrow and repentance, after long faſting and tears, and the greateſt ſigns of humiliation that can be imagined. In caſe of the greateſt offences they were ſeldom reconciled,

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till they came to lye upon their death-beds: and in case of other scandalous sins, not till after the humiliation of many years. This perhaps may be thought too great severity; but I am sure we are as much too remiss now, as they were over-rigorous then: but were the ancient discipline of the church in any degree put in practice now, what case would the generality of Christians be in! In what herds and shoals would men be driven out of the communion of the church! It is true, the prodigious degeneracy and corruption of Christians hath long since broke these bounds, and 'tis morally impossible to revive the strictness of the ancient discipline in any measure, till the world grow better; but yet we ought to reflect, with shame and confusion of face, upon the purer ages of the church, and sadly to consider how few among us would in those days have been accounted Christians; and upon this consideration to be provoked to an emulation of those better times, and to a reformation of those faults and miscarriages, which in the best days of Christianity were reckoned inconsistent with the Christian profession; and to remember that though the discipline of the church be not now the same it was then, yet the judgment and severity of God is; and that those who live in any vicious course of life, though they continue in the communion of the church, yet they shall be shut out of the kingdom of God. *We are sure that the judgment of God will be according to truth, against them which commit such things.*

6*thly*, and *lastly*, The consideration of what hath been said, should confirm and establish us in the profession of our holy religion. It is true, we are not now in danger of apostatizing from Christianity to the heathen idolatry; but we have too many sad examples of those who apostatize from the profession of the gospel which they have taken upon them in baptism, to atheism and infidelity, to all manner of impiety and lewdness. There are many who daily fall off from the profession of the reformed religion, to the gross errors and superstitions of the Roman church, which in many things does too near-

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ly reſemble the old Pagan idolatry. And what the Apoſtle here ſays of the Apoſtates of his time, is proportionably true of thoſe of our days, that *they who thus fall away*, it is *extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance.* And it ought to be remembred, that the guilt of this kind of apoſtacy hath driven ſome to deſpair; as in the caſe of Spira, who, for reſiſting the light and convictions of his mind, was caſt into thoſe agonies, and filled with ſuch terrors, as if *the very pains of hell had taken hold on him*; and in that fearful deſpair, and in the midſt of thoſe horrors, he breathed out his ſoul.

Let us then hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering; and let us take heed how we contradict the profeſſion of our faith, by any impiety and wickedneſs in our lives; remembring that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* I will conclude with the words of the Apoſtle immediately after the text, *The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dreſſed, receiveth bleſſing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto curſing, whoſe end is to be burned.* And how gladly would I add the next words! *But beloved, we are perſuaded better things of you, and things that accompany ſalvation, though we thus ſpeak.*

SER-

SERMON CXXII.

Chriſt the author, and obedience the condition of ſalvation.

HEB. v. 9.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal ſalvation unto all them that obey him.

THIS is ſpoken of Chriſt, our great High-prieſt under the goſpel; upon the excellency of whoſe perſon, and the efficacy of his ſacrifice for the eternal benefit and ſalvation of mankind, the Apoſtle inſiſts ſo largely in this, and the following chapters; but the ſum of all is briefly comprehended in the text, that our High-prieſt *being made perfect, became the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him.*

In which words we have theſe four things conſiderable:

1*ſt*, The great bleſſing and benefit here ſpoken of, and that is *eternal ſalvation*; and this implies in it, not only our deliverance from hell, and redemption from eternal miſery; but the obtaining of eternal life and happineſs for us.

2*dly*, The author of this great bleſſing and benefit to mankind; and that is *Jeſus Chriſt the Son of God*; who is here repreſented to us under the notion of our *High-prieſt*, who by making atonement for us, and reconciling us to God, is ſaid to be the *author of eternal ſalvation* to mankind.

3*dly*, The way and means whereby he became the author of our ſalvation; *being made perfect, he became the author of eternal ſalvation.* The word is τελειωθεὶς, having conſummated his work and finiſhed his courſe, and received the reward of it. For this

this word hath an alluſion to thoſe that run in a race, where he that wins receives the crown. And to this the Apoſtle plainly alludes, Phil. iii. 12. where he ſays, *not as though I had already attained,* οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον, not as if I had already taken hold of the prize; but I am preſſing, or reaching forward towards it; ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, or *were already perfect*; that is, not as if I had finiſhed my courſe, or had the prize or crown in my hand; but I am preſſing forward towards it. In like manner, our bleſſed Saviour, when he had finiſhed the courſe of his humiliation and obedience, which was accompliſhed in his ſufferings, and had received the reward of them, being riſen from the dead, and *exalted to the right hand of God,* and *crowned with glory and honour,* he is ſaid to be τελειωθεὶς, *made perfect*; and therefore, when he was giving up the ghoſt upon the croſs, he ſaid, John xix. 30. τετέλεσται, *it is finiſhed,* or perfected; that is, he had done all that was neceſſary to be done, by way of ſuffering for our redemption. And the ſame word is likewiſe uſed, Luke xiii. 32. concerning our Saviour's ſufferings, *I do cures to day and to morrow,* καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ τελειοῦμαι, *and the third day I ſhall be perfected*; this he ſpake concerning his own death. And therefore, chap. ii. 10. God is ſaid to *make the captain of our ſalvation perfect through ſufferings;* διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι. And thus our High-prieſt being *made perfect* in this ſenſe, that is, having finiſhed his courſe, which was accompliſhed in his ſufferings, and having received the reward of them, in being *exalted at the right hand of God, he became the author of eternal ſalvation to us.*

4thly, You have here the qualifications of the perſons who are made partakers of this great benefit, or the condition upon which it is ſuſpended, and that is *obedience*; *he became the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him.*

Theſe are the main things contained in the text. For the fuller explication whereof, I ſhall take into conſideration theſe five things:

1*ſt*, How and by what means Chriſt is the *author of our ſalvation.*

2*dly*, What *obedience* the goſpel requires as a condition, and is pleaſed to accept as a qualification, in thoſe who hope for eternal ſalvation.

3*dly*, We will conſider the poſſibility of performing this condition, by that grace and aſſiſtance which is offered, and ready to be afforded to us by the goſpel.

4*thly*, The neceſſity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happineſs.

And 5*thly*, I ſhall ſhew that this is no prejudice to the law of faith, and the free grace and mercy of God, declared in the goſpel.

1*ſt*, We will conſider how and by what means *Chriſt is the author of our ſalvation*; and this is contained in theſe words, *being made perfect, he became the author of eternal ſalvation*; that is, (as I told you before) having finiſhed his courſe, which was accompliſhed in his laſt ſufferings; and having received the reward of them, being *exalted at the right hand of God*, he *became the author of eternal ſalvation* to us; ſo that by all he did, and ſuffered for us, in the days of his fleſh, and in the ſtate of his humiliation, and by all that he ſtill continues to do for us, now that he is in heaven at the right hand of God; he hath effected and brought about the great work of our ſalvation. His doctrine and his life, his death and ſufferings, his reſurrection from the dead, and his powerful interceſſion for us at the right hand of God, have all a great influence upon the reforming and ſaving of mankind; and by all theſe ways and means, he is the author and cauſe of our ſalvation; as a rule, and as a pattern, as a price and propitiation, and as a patron and advocate that is continually pleading our cauſe, and interceding with God on our behalf, *for mercy and grace to help in time of need.*

And indeed our condition required an High-prieſt who was qualified in all theſe reſpects, for the recovery of mankind out of that corrupt and degenerate ſtate into which it was ſunk; an High-prieſt whoſe

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lips should preserve knowledge, and from whose mouth we might learn the law of God; whose life should be a perfect pattern of holiness to us, and his death a *propitiation for the sins of the whole world*; and by whose grace and assistance we should be endowed with power and strength to mortify our lusts, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God; and therefore *such an High-priest became us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, who might have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, and being himself compassed with infirmities, might have the feeling of ours, being in all points tempted as we are, only without sin*; and in a word, *might be able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us.*

By these qualifications our High-priest is described in this epistle; and by these he is every way suited to all our defects and infirmities, all our wants and necessities; to instruct our ignorance by his doctrine, and to lead us in the path of righteousness by his most holy and most exemplary life; to expiate the guilt of our sins by his death; and to procure grace and assistance for us, by his prevalent intercession on our behalf. By all these ways, and in all these respects, he is said to be *the author of eternal salvation.*

1*st*, By the holiness and purity of his doctrine, whereby we are perfectly instructed in the will of God and our duty, and powerfully excited and persuaded to the practice of it. The rules and directions of a holy life were very obscure before, and the motives and encouragements to virtue but weak and ineffectual, in comparison of what they are now rendered by the revelation of the gospel. The general corruption of mankind; and the vicious practice of the world, had in a great measure blurred and defaced the natural law; so that the heathen world for many ages, had but a very dark and doubtful knowledge of their duty, especially as to several instances of it. The custom of several vices had so prevailed among mankind, as almost quite to extinguish the natural sense of their evil and deformity. And the Jews,

who enjoyed a conſiderable degree of divine revelation, had no ſtrict regard to the morality of their actions; and contenting themſelves with ſome kind of outward conformity to the bare letter of the ten commandments, were almoſt wholly taken up with little ceremonies and obſervances, in which they placed the main of their religion, almoſt wholly neglecting the greater duties, *and weightier matters of the law.*

And therefore our bleſſed Saviour, to free mankind from theſe wanderings and uncertainties about the will of God, revealed the moral law, and explained the full force and meaning of it, clearing all doubts, and ſupplying all the defects of it, by a more particular and explicit declaration of the ſeveral parts of our duty, and by precepts of greater perfection, than the world was ſufficiently acquainted withal before; of greater humility and more univerſal charity; of abſtaining from revenge and forgiving injuries, and returning to our enemies good for evil, and love for ill-will, and bleſſings and prayers for curſes and perſecutions. Theſe virtues indeed were ſometimes, and yet but very rarely, recommended before in the counſels of wiſe men; but either not in that degree of perfection, or not under that degree of neceſſity, and as having the force of laws, and laying an univerſal obligation of indiſpenſible duty upon all mankind.

And as our bleſſed Saviour hath given a greater clearneſs, and certainty, and perfection, to the rule of our duty, ſo he hath revealed, and brought into a clearer light, more powerful motives and encouragements to the conſtant and careful practice of it; for *life and immortality are brought to light by the goſpel*; the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead being a plain and convincing demonſtration of the immortality of our ſouls, and another life after this, and an evidence to us both of his power, and of the fidelity of his promiſe, to raiſe us from the dead. Not but that mankind had ſome obſcure apprehenſions of theſe things before. Good men had always good hopes of another life, and future rewards in another

another world; and the worſt of men were not without ſome fears of the judgment and vengeance of another world; but men had diſputed themſelves into great doubts and uncertainties about theſe things; and as men that are in doubt, are almoſt indifferent which way they go; ſo the uncertain apprehenſions which men had of a future ſtate, and of the rewards and puniſhments of another world, had but a very faint influence upon the minds of men, and wanted that preſſing and determining force to virtue and a good life, which a firm belief and clear conviction of theſe things, would have infuſed into them.

But now *the light of the glorious goſpel of Chriſt* hath ſcattered all theſe clouds, and chaſed away that groſs darkneſs which hid the other world from our ſight, and hath removed all doubts concerning the immortality of mens ſouls, and their future ſtate; and now *the kingdom of heaven*, with all its treaſures of life, and happineſs, and glory, lies open to our view, and *hell is alſo naked before us, and deſtruction hath no covering*. So that the hopes and fears of men are now perfectly awakened, and all ſorts of conſiderations that may ſerve to quicken and encourage our obedience, and to deter and affrighten men from a wicked life, are expoſed to the view of all men, and do ſtare every man's conſcience in the face. And this is that which renders the goſpel ſo admirable and powerful an inſtrument for the reforming of mankind, and, as the Apoſtle calls it, *the mighty power of God unto ſalvation*; becauſe therein life and immortality are ſet before us, as the certain and glorious reward of our obedience; and *therein* alſo *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men*. So that conſidering the perfection of our rule, and the powerful enforcements of it upon the conſciences of men, by the clear diſcovery and firm aſſurance of the eternal recompence of another world; nothing can be imagined better ſuited to its end, than the doctrine of the goſpel is to make men wiſe, and holy, and good unto ſalvation; both by inſtructing them perfectly in their duty, and urging them powerfully to the practice of it.

2*dly*, The example of our Saviour's life is likewise another excellent means to this end. The law lays an obligation upon us; but a pattern gives life and encouragement, and renders our duty more easy, and practicable, and familiar to us; for here we see obedience to the divine law practised in our own nature, and performed by a man like ourselves, *in all things like unto us, sin only excepted.* It is true indeed, this exception makes a great difference, and seems to take off very much from the encouraging force and virtue of this example. No wonder if he that was without sin, and was God as well as man, performed all righteousness; and therefore where is the encouragement of this example? That our nature, pure and uncorrupted, supported and assisted by the Divinity, to which it was united, should be perfectly conformed to the law of God, as it is no strange thing, so neither doth it seem to have that force and encouragement in it, which an example more suited to our weakness might have had. But then this cannot be denied, that it hath the advantage of perfection, which a pattern ought to have, and to which, though we can never attain, yet we may always be aspiring towards it; and certainly we cannot better learn, how God would have men to live, than by seeing how God himself lived, when he was pleased to assume our nature, and to become man.

And then, we are to consider that the Son of God did not assume our nature in its highest glory and perfection, but compassed with infirmities, and liable in all points to be tempted like as we are; but still it was without sin; and therefore God doth not exact from us perfect obedience, and that we should *fulfil all righteousness*, as he did; he makes allowance for the corruption of our nature, and is pleased to accept of our sincere, though very imperfect obedience: But after all this, his human nature was united to his Divinity, and he had the *Spirit without measure*; and this would indeed make a wide difference between us and our pattern, as to the purpose of holiness and obedience, if we were destitute of that assistance which is necessary to enable us to the discharge of our duty; but

but this God offers, and is ready to afford to us, for he hath promiſed *to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him*; and *the Spirit of him that raiſed up Chriſt Jeſus from the dead* dwells in all good men, who ſincerely deſire to do the will of God: *in the working out our ſalvation, God worketh in us both to will and to do.*

So that as to that obedience which the goſpel requires of us, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, if we do not *receive the grace of God in vain*, and *quench and reſiſt his bleſſed Spirit*, we may be as really aſſiſted as *the Son of God* himſelf was; for, in this reſpect, all true and ſincere Chriſtians are *the ſons of God*; ſo that St. Paul tells us, Rom. viii. 14. *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the ſons of God.*

So that if all things be duly conſidered, the life of our bleſſed Saviour, as it is the moſt perfect, ſo in the main, it is a very proper pattern for our imitation, and could not have come nearer to us, without wanting that perfection which is neceſſary to a compleat and abſolute pattern. The *Son of God* condeſcended to every thing that might render him the moſt familiar and equal example to us, excepting that, which as it was impoſſible, ſo it had been infinitely diſhonourable to him, and would have ſpoiled the perfection of his example; he came as near to us as was fit or poſſible, *being in all things like unto us, ſin only excepted*; that is, abating that one thing which he came to deſtroy and aboliſh, and which would have deſtroyed the very end of his coming; for if he had not been without ſin, he could neither have made an expiation for ſin, nor have been a perfect pattern of holineſs and obedience.

And as the life of our bleſſed Saviour had all the perfection that is requiſite to an abſolute pattern, (ſo that by conſidering his temper and ſpirit, and the actions of his life, we may reform all the vicious inclinations of our minds, and the exorbitancies of our paſſions, and the errors and irregularities of our lives) ſo it is a very powerful example, and of great force to oblige and provoke us to the imitation of it; for it

it is the example of one whom we ought to reverence, and have reason to love, above any person in the world: The example of our Prince and sovereign Lord, of our best friend and greatest benefactor, of the High-priest of our profession, and the Captain of our salvation, of the author and finisher of our faith, of one who came down from heaven for our sakes, and was contented to assume our nature together with the infirmities of it, and to live in a low and mean condition, for no other reason but that he might have the opportunity to instruct and lead mankind in the way to life, to deliver us from sin and wrath, and to bring us to God and happiness. It was the example of one who laid down his life for us, and sealed his love to us in his blood, and whilst we were enemies, did and suffered more for us, than ever any man did for his friend.

And surely these considerations cannot but mightily recommend and endear to us this example of our Lord and Saviour. We are ambitious to imitate those whom we highly esteem and reverence, and are apt to have their examples in great veneration, from whom we have received great kindnesses and benefits, and are always endeavouring to be like those whom we love, and are apt to conform ourselves to the will and pleasure of those from whom we have received great favours, and who are continually heaping great obligations upon us.

So that whether we consider the excellency of our pattern, or the mighty endearments of it to us, by that infinite love and kindness which he hath expressed towards us, we have all the temptation, and all the provocation in the world, to endeavour to be like him; for who would not gladly tread in the steps of *the Son of God*, and of the best friend that the sons of men ever had? Who will not follow that example to which we stand indebted for the greatest blessings and benefits that ever were procured for mankind? Thus you see of what force and advantage the example of our blessed Saviour is toward the recovery and salvation of mankind.

3dly, He-

3*dly*, He is *the author of eternal ſalvation*, as he hath purchaſed it for us, by the merit of his obedience and ſufferings, by which he hath obtained eternal redemption for us; not only deliverance from the wrath to come, but eternal life and happineſs. When by our ſins we had juſtly incurred the wrath and diſpleaſure of Almighty God, and were liable to eternal death and miſery, he was contented to be ſubſtituted a ſacrifice for us, *to bear our ſins in his own body on the tree*, and to expiate the guilt of all our offences by his own ſufferings. He died for us, that is, not only for our benefit and advantage, but in our place and ſtead: So that if he had not died, we had eternally periſhed; and becauſe he died, we are ſaved from that eternal ruin and puniſhment, which was due to us for our ſins.

And this, though it be no where in ſcripture called by the name or term of ſatisfaction, yet, which is the ſame thing in effect, it is called *the price of our redemption*; for as we are ſinners, we are liable and indebted to the juſtice of God, and our bleſſed Saviour, by his death and ſufferings hath diſcharged this obligation; which diſcharge, ſince it was obtained for us by *the ſhedding of his precious blood, without which*, the ſcripture expreſly ſays, *there had been no remiſſion of ſin*, why it may not properly enough be called payment and ſatisfaction, I confeſs I cannot underſtand. Not that God was angry with his Son, for he was always well pleaſed with him; or that our Saviour ſuffered the very ſame which the ſinner ſhould have done in his own perſon, the proper pains and torments of the damned; but that his perfect obedience and grievous ſufferings, undergone for our ſakes, and upon our account, were of that value and eſteem with God, and his voluntary ſacrifice of himſelf in our ſtead, ſo highly acceptable and well pleaſing to him, that he thereupon was pleaſed to enter into a covenant of grace and mercy with mankind; wherein he hath promiſed and engaged himſelf to forgive the ſins of all thoſe who ſincerely repent and believe, and to make them partakers of eternal life. And hence it is, that the blood of Chriſt,

which

which was ſhed for us upon the croſs, is called *the blood of the covenant*; as being the ſanction of that new covenant of the goſpel, into which God is entered with mankind; and not only the confirmation, but the very fonndation of it; for which reaſon, the cup in the Lord's ſupper (which repreſents to us the blood of Chriſt) is called *the new teſtament in his blood, which was ſhed for many for the remiſſion of ſins*.

4*thly*, and *laſtly*, Chriſt is ſaid to be *the author of our ſalvation*, in reſpect of his powerful and perpetual interceſſion for us at the right hand of God. And this ſeems to be more eſpecially intimated and intended, in that expreſſion here in the text, that *being made perfect he became the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*. Which words, *of his being perfected*, do, as I have ſhewed before, more immediately refer to his ſufferings, and the reward that followed them, *his exaltation at the right hand of God*, where *he lives for ever to make interceſſion for us*; by which perpetual and moſt prevalent interceſſion of his, he procures all thoſe benefits to be beſtowed upon us, which he purchaſed for us by his death; the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and our acceptance with God, and perfect reſtitution to his favour, upon our faith and repentance, and the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit to enable us to a ſincere diſcharge of our duty, to ſtrengthen us againſt all the temptations of the world, the fleſh and the Devil, to keep us from all evil, and to preſerve us to his heavenly kingdom.

And this is that which our Apoſtle calls *obtaining of mercy, and finding grace to help in time of need*, ch. iv. ver. 16. of this epiſtle. Our bleſſed Saviour, now that he is advanced into heaven, and *exalted on the right hand of the majeſty on high*, doth out of the tendereſt affection and compaſſion to mankind, ſtill proſecute that great and merciful deſign of our ſalvation which was begun by him here on earth, and in virtue of his meritorious obedience and ſufferings does offer up our prayers to God, and as it were plead our cauſe with God, and repreſent to him all our wants and neceſſities, and obtain a favourable anſwer

ſwer of our petitions put up to God in his name, and all neceſſary ſupplies of grace and ſtrength, proportionable to our temptations and infirmities.

And by virtue of this powerful interceſſion of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer, our ſins are pardoned upon our ſincere repentance, our prayers are graciouſly anſwered, our wants are abundantly ſupplied, and the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Spirit are plentifully afforded to us, to excite us to our duty, to ſtrengthen us in well-doing, to comfort us in afflictions, to ſupport us under the greateſt trials and ſufferings, and *to keep us through faith unto ſalvation.*

And for this reaſon, as the purchaſing of our ſalvation is in ſcripture attributed to the death and ſufferings of Chriſt; ſo the perfecting and finiſhing of it is aſcribed to the prevalency of his interceſſion at the right hand of God for us. So the Apoſtle tells us, chap. vii. ver. 25. that *he is able to ſave to the uttermoſt all thoſe that come to God by him; ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for us.* He died once to purchaſe ſalvation for us; and that we may not fall ſhort of it, but receive the full benefit of this purchaſe, *he lives for ever to make interceſſion for us,* and thus *he ſaves to the uttermoſt all thoſe that come to God by him*; that is, he takes care of the whole buſineſs of our ſalvation from firſt to laſt. And now that he is in heaven, he is as intent to procure our welfare and happineſs, and as tenderly concerned for us as when he lived here among us upon earth, as when he hung upon the croſs, and *poured out his ſoul an offering for our ſins*; for he appears at the right hand of God in our nature, that which he aſſumed for our ſakes, which was made ſubject to, and ſenſible of our infirmities, and which *was tempted in all things like as we are, only without ſin*; and therefore *he knows how to pity* and ſuccour *them that are tempted*; and from the remembrance of his own ſufferings, is prompted to a compaſſionate ſenſe of ours, and never ceaſeth in virtue of his blood, which was ſhed for us, to plead our cauſe with God, and to intercede powerfully in our behalf.

So

So that the virtue and efficacy of Chriſt's interceſſion on our behalf, is founded in the redemption, which he wrought for us, by his blood and ſufferings; which being entered into heaven, he repreſents to God on our behalf. As the High-prieſt under the law did enter into the holy place with the blood of the ſacrifice that had been offered, and in virtue of that blood interceded for the people; *So Chriſt by his own blood entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, chap. ix. ver. 12. He *entered into the holy place*, that is, into heaven itſelf, *to make interceſſion for us*, as the Apoſtle explains himſelf, ver. 24. *Chriſt is not entered into the holy places which are made with hands; but into heaven itſelf, to appear in the preſence of God for us.* And chap. x. ver. 12. ſpeaking of Chriſt's appearing for us at the right hand of God, *this man*, ſays he, *after he had offered one ſacrifice for ſin for ever* (that is, a ſacrifice of perpetual virtue and efficacy) *ſat down at the right hand of God*, that is, to intercede for us in virtue of that ſacrifice.

From all which it appears that the virtue of Chriſt's mediation and interceſſion for us in heaven, is founded in his ſacrifice, and the price of our redemption which he paid on earth, in ſhedding his blood for us.

From whence the Apoſtle reaſons, that *there is but one mediator between God and man*, by whom we are to addreſs our prayers to God, 1 Tim. ii. 5. *There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus, who gave himſelf a ranſom for all.* His mediation is founded in his ranſom, or the price which he paid for our redemption. The Apoſtle indeed does not ſay there is but one Mediator between God and man in expreſs words, but ſurely he means ſo; if by ſaying there is one God, he means there is but one God, for they are joined together, and the very ſame expreſſion uſed concerning both; *there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men*; that is, there is but one God, and one Mediator. But then, they of the church of Rome endeavour

deavour to avoid this plain text, by diſtinguiſhing between a mediator of redemption, and a mediator of interceſſion: But now if Chriſt's mediation, by way of interceſſion, be founded in the virtue of his redemption; then if there be but one Mediator of redemption, then there is but one Mediator of interceſſion in heaven for us. *There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus, who gave himſelf a ranſom for all.* So that the power and prevalency of his interceſſion is founded in his ranſom, that is, the price of our redemption; in virtue whereof alone he intercedes with God for us, as the Apoſtle to the Hebrews does moſt plainly aſſert. So that all other interceſſors in heaven for us are excluded from offering and preſenting our prayers to God beſides *our High-prieſt, who is at the right hand of God, and lives for ever, to make interceſſion for us,* and by virtue of his interceſſion, *is able to ſave to the uttermoſt all thoſe that come to God by him,* that is, who put up their prayers to God in the alone virtue of his mediation. So that as there is no need of any other, if his interceſſion be available to ſave to the uttermoſt: ſo there is great danger in applying to any other (whether Saint or Angel, or even the bleſſed Virgin) if the benefit of his interceſſion be limited to thoſe who *come to God by him.* And thus I have ſhewn by what means Chriſt is the author of our ſalvation; which was the firſt thing propoſed to be conſidered. I proceed to the

Second thing I propoſed to enquire into; namely, what obedience the goſpel requires as a condition, and is pleaſed to accept as a qualification, in thoſe who hope for eternal ſalvation. And this I ſhall explain, firſt negatively; and then poſitively.

1*ſt*, Negatively; It is not a mere outward profeſſion of the Chriſtian religion, and owning of Chriſt for our Lord and law-giver, that will be accepted in this caſe. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord,* (ſaith our Saviour) *ſhall enter into the kingdom of God.* By which we may very reaſonably underſtand, all that profeſſion of religion, which falls ſhort of obedience and a holy life; as the profeſſion of faith

in Chriſt, being baptized into his name and religion, the mere belief of his doctrine, and the owning of him for our Lord and Saviour; no, nor the external worſhip of him, and profeſſion of ſubjection to him, by prayer and hearing his word, and communicating in the holy ſacrament. No, though this be ſet off in the moſt glorious manner, by propheſying and working miracles in his name; for ſo it follows in the next words, *Many ſhall ſay to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name, and in thy name have caſt out devils, and in thy name have done many wondrous works? We have eat and drunk in thy preſence, and have heard thee preach in our ſtreets.* But he tells us, that nothing of all this without obedience to his laws, will be ſufficient to gain us admiſſion into heaven.

2*dly*, Poſitively; That which God requires as a condition, and will accept as a qualification in thoſe who hope for eternal life, is faith in Chriſt, and a ſincere and univerſal obedience to the precepts of his holy goſpel. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of God: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* And here in the text it is expreſly ſaid, that *Chriſt is the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*, τοῖς ὑπακούσιν αὐτῷ, to them that hearken to him; that is, to them that do ſo hear and believe his goſpel, as to obey it; to them and no other, he is the author of eternal ſalvation.

And that we may the more clearly and diſtinctly underſtand what obedience it is, which the goſpel exacts as an indiſpenſable condition of eternal ſalvation, and a neceſſary qualification in all thoſe who hope to be made partakers of it; we may be pleaſed to conſider, that there is a virtual and actual obedience to the laws of God; a perfect and ſincere obedience to them; the explication of theſe terms, will give us a diſtinct conception of the things we are ſpeaking of.

1*ſt*, There is a virtual, and there is an actual obedience to the laws of God. By an actual obedience, I mean the practice and exerciſe of the ſeveral graces and

and virtues of Chriſtianity, and the courſe and tenor of a holy life; when *out of a good converſation men do ſhew forth their works*; and by the outward actions of their lives do give real teſtimony of their piety, juſtice, ſobriety, humility, meekneſs, and charity, and all other Chriſtian graces and virtues, as occaſion is miniſtred for the practice and exerciſe of them.

By a virtual obedience, I mean a ſincere belief of the goſpel, of the holineſs and equity of its precepts, of the truth of its promiſes, and the terror of its threatenings, and a true repentance for all our ſins. This is obedience in the root and principle; for he who ſincerely believes the goſpel, and does truly repent of the errors and miſcarriages of his life, is firmly reſolved to obey the commandments of God, and to walk before him in holineſs and righteouſneſs all the days of his life; ſo that there is nothing that prevents or hinders this man's actual obedience to the laws of God, in the courſe of a holy and good life, but only the want of time and opportunity for it. And this was the caſe of thoſe, who, upon the hearing of the goſpel when it was firſt preached to them, did heartily embrace it, and turn from their ſins, and the worſhip of idols, to the true and living God, but perhaps were cut off ſoon after; (as there were many who being but newly gained to Chriſtianity, were preſently put to death, and ſuffered martyrdom for that profeſſion) there is no doubt to be made, but that in this caſe, a virtual obedience was in ſuch perſons a ſufficient qualification for eternal life.

But where there is time and opportunity for the exerciſe of our obedience, and the practice of the virtues of a holy life, there actual obedience to the laws and precepts of the goſpel is neceſſary, to qualify us for eternal happineſs; ſo that though a man do ſincerely believe the goſpel, and truly repent of his ſins, and reſolve upon a better life; yet if he do not afterwards, in the courſe of his life, put this reſolution in practice, and *bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and amendment of life*, and perſevere in a holy courſe, his firſt reſolution of obedience, though it were ſincere, will not avail him to ſalvation. Nay, if he

ſhould continue for ſome time in the reſolution and practice of a holy and virtuous life, and afterwards fall off from it, and *turn from the holy commandment delivered unto him, his latter end would be worſe than his beginning; all his righteouſneſs that he hath done would not be remembered; he ſhall dy in his iniquity.* For *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord. If any man draw back, God's ſoul will have no pleaſure in him.* This is ſo very clear and plain from ſcripture, that no man can entertain a contrary perſuaſion, without contradicting the whole tenor of the Bible.

The ſum of what I have ſaid is this, that a virtual obedience and ſincere faith and repentance are ſufficient, where there is no time and opportunity for actual obedience, and the practice of a good life: but where there is opportunity for actual obedience, and the continued practice of a good life, and perſeverance therein; they are indiſpenſably neceſſary in order to our eternal ſalvation, and a well grounded hope and aſſurance of it.

2*dly*, There is a perfect and there is a ſincere obedience. Perfect obedience conſiſts in the exact conformity of our hearts and lives to the law of God, without the leaſt imperfection, and without failing in any point or degree of our duty. And this obedience, as it is not conſiſtent with the frailty and infirmity of corrupt nature, and the imperfection of our preſent ſtate, ſo neither doth God require it of us as a neceſſary condition of eternal life. We are indeed commanded to be *perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect:* but we are not to underſtand this ſtrictly and rigorouſly; for that is not only impoſſible to men in this preſent ſtate of imperfection, but abſolutely impoſſible to human nature, for *men to be perfect as God is perfect:* but the plain meaning of this precept is, that we ſhould imitate thoſe divine perfections of goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and purity, and endeavour to be as like God in all theſe as we can, and be ſtill aſpiring after a nearer reſemblance of him, as may be evident to any one who conſiders the connexion and occaſion of theſe words.

By

By a sincere obedience, I mean such a conformity of our lives and actions to the law of God, as to the general course and tenor of them, that we do not live in the habitual practice of any known sin, or in the customary neglect of any material or considerable part of our known duty; and that we be not wilfully and deliberately guilty of the single act of heinous and notorious sins, as I have formerly explained this matter more at large in another discourse. And this obedience, even in the best of men, is mixt with great frailty and imperfection; but yet because it is the utmost that we can do in this state of infirmity and imperfection, the terms of the gospel are so merciful and gracious, as that God is pleased for the sake of the meritorious obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour, to accept this sincere, though imperfect obedience, and to reward it with eternal life. And this, I doubt not, after all the intricate disputes, and infinite controversies about this business, is the true and clear state of the matter.

And this sincere obedience which the gospel requires of us, as a condition of our happiness, tho' it be sometimes called by Divines, *evangelical perfection*; yet it is but very improperly so called; for nothing is properly perfect, to which any thing is wanting; and great defects and imperfections must needs be acknowledged in the obedience of the best and holiest men upon earth; and they who pretend to perfection in this life, do neither understand the law of God, nor themselves, but, (as St. John says of such persons) *they deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them*; and besides other imperfections, these two are evident in them, *ignorance and pride*.

And thus much may suffice to have spoken to this second particular, namely, what obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification for eternal life.

SERMON CXXIII.

The possibility and necessity of gospel-obedience, and its consistence with free grace.

HEB. V. 9.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

The second sermon on this text.

FOR the explication of these words, I proposed to consider these five things:

1*st*, How and by what means Christ is the author of our salvation.

2*dly*, What obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal salvation.

3*dly*, The possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offered, and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel.

4*thly*, The necessity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness.

5*thly*, The consistency of this method and means of our salvation with the law of faith, and the free grace and mercy of God declared in the gospel.

I have handled the two first of these, and now proceed to the

Third thing I proposed to consider, *viz.* The possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offered and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel. For if Christ be *the author of eternal salvation* only *to those who obey him*; then those who live in disobedience to the gospel, are in a state of damnation. But there cannot be the guilt of

of diſobedience, where obedience is impoſſible; no man being guilty, or juſtly liable to puniſhment, for the not doing of that, which it was no ways poſſible for him to do. Therefore the covenant of the goſpel, into which God is entered with mankind, doth neceſſarily ſuppoſe the poſſibility of performing the condition of it; otherwiſe it leaves them in as bad a condition as they were in before, becauſe it only offers new bleſſings and benefits to us, but ſets us never the nearer the obtaining of them, if ſo be the condition upon which they are granted be altogether impoſſible to us; nay, it renders our ſtate many degrees worſe, if our not performing the condition of ſuch gracious offers brings us under new and greater guilt.

If it be ſaid, that ſome few perſons have great benefit by it, becauſe they by an eſpecial and effectual grace ſhall be enabled to perform the conditions of this covenant; is not this a ſtrange ſtraitening to the grace and mercy of the goſpel, to confine it within ſo narrow a compaſs, as ſtill to leave the greateſt part of mankind in a worſe condition, than if ſalvation had never been offered to them; as it certainly does, if (as this doctrine does neceſſarily ſuppoſe) the guilt and puniſhment of men ſhall be greatly increaſed and heightened by their contempt of, and diſobedience to the goſpel; when at the ſame time it is acknowledged, that it was not poſſible for thoſe men to obey it, for want of that ſpecial and effectual grace, which is neceſſary to enable them thereto? I do not love to handle theſe points contentiouſly, but this in my apprehenſion does as much derogate from the amplitude and riches of God's grace in the goſpel, as any thing that can eaſily be ſaid.

And therefore, for the right ſtating and clearing of this matter, I ſhall endeavour to make out theſe three things:

1. That we are not ſufficient of ourſelves, and by any power in us, to perform the condition of the goſpel.

2. That the grace of God is ready to enable and aſſiſt

aſſiſt us to the performance of theſe conditions, if we be not wanting to ourſelves.'

3. That what the grace of God is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, that may properly be ſaid to be poſſible to us, and, in ſome ſenſe, in our power.

1. That we are not ſufficient of ourſelves, and by any power in us, to perform the condition of the goſpel. The grace of God doth clearly appear in the whole buſineſs of our ſalvation: *By grace ye are ſaved*, (ſays the Apoſtle) *and that not of yourſelves, it is the gift of God.* Faith is the gift of God, and ſo is repentance. *It is God that works in us both to will and to do, of his own goodneſs*; that is, who both inclines and excites us to that which is good, and enables us to do it. *Without me* (ſays Chriſt) *ye can do nothing*; and *through Chriſt ſtrengthening me* (ſaith St. Paul) *I am able to do all things*; all things which God requires of us, and expects to be done by us in order to our ſalvation. Without the grace of Chriſt, *we are without ſtrength*; *and are not ſufficient of ourſelves, as of ourſelves, to think a good thought*; that is, we are not ſufficient of ourſelves to deſign or reſolve upon any thing that is good; *but our ſufficiency is of God.*

The depravation of our nature hath brought a great impotency and diſability upon us to that which is good; and we have made ourſelves much weaker by evil practice; by the power of evil habits we are enſlaved to our luſts, and *ſold under ſin.* So that if at any time we are convinced of our duty, and from that conviction have an inclination to that which is good, *evil is preſent to us.* When the law of God gives us the knowledge of our duty, and ſtares our conſciences in the face, *there is another law in our members, warring againſt the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of ſin, which is in our members.* Sin brings us under the power of Satan, and gives him dominion over us. *For his ſervants ye are whom ye obey*; ſo that he rules and bears ſway in us, and *we are led captive by him at his pleaſure.* Evil and vicious habits are a kind of ſecond nature-

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superinduced upon us, which takes away our power and liberty to that which is good, and renders it impossible to us to raise and rescue ourselves; so that *we are prisoners and captives*, till *the Son of God sets us free*; and *dead in trespasses and sins*, till *he gives us life*. And therefore the Prophet represents the recovery of ourselves from the bondage of sin, by such things as are naturally impossible, to shew how great our weakness and impotency is; Jer. xiii. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil.* And by how much stronger the chains of our sins are, and the more unable we are to break loose from them; by so much the greater and more evident is the necessity of the divine assistance, and of the power of God's grace, to knock off those fetters, and to rescue us from this bondage and slavery.

2. The grace of God is ready to assist and enable us to the performance of these conditions, that is, to faith and repentance, and all the purposes of obedience and a holy life; if we be not wanting to ourselves, and do not reject or neglect to make use of that grace, which God offers us, and is ready to afford to us in a very plentiful manner. And this is that which renders all the mercies of the gospel effectual (if it be not our own fault and wilful neglect) to the great end and design of our salvation; and without this, all the gracious offers of the gospel would signify nothing at all to our advantage.

And this likewise is that which renders the unbelief and impenitency and disobedience of men utterly inexcusable, because nothing of all this does proceed from want of power, but of will to do better. And therefore this is so necessary an encouragement to all the endeavours of obedience and a good life, that men should be assured of God's readiness to assist and help them in the doing of their duty; that without this the revelation of the gospel, though never so clear, would signify nothing to us, all the precepts and directions for a good life, and the most vehement persuasions and exhortations to obedience, would

have no force and life in them; for what ſignifies it to direct the dead, and ſpeak to them that cannot hear, and to perſuade men, though it were with all the earneſtneſs in the world, to thoſe things which it is impoſſible for them to do?

Therefore our bleſſed Saviour, when he had laid down, and explained the precepts of holineſs and virtue in his ſermon upon the mount, to encourage them to what he had been directing and propoſing to them, he aſſures them that God is ready to afford his grace and aſſiſtance to all thoſe that are ſincerely deſirous to do his will, and do earneſtly implore his grace and aſſiſtance to that purpoſe. Matth. vii. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. *Ask* (ſaith he) *and it ſhall be given you; ſeek, and ye ſhall find; knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that ſeeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it ſhall be opened.* So that if any man want the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, it is his own fault; it is either for want of ſeeking, or for want of earneſtneſs in asking; for our Saviour expreſly aſſures us, that he denies it to none; *for every one that asketh, receiveth.*

And to give us a more lively and ſenſible aſſurance of this, he repreſents the care and kindneſs of God to men, by the affections of earthly parents to their children, who though they be many times evil themſelves, yet are not wont to deny their children neceſſary good things, when they decently and dutifully beg them at their hands; *what man is there of you, whom if his ſon ask bread, will he give him a ſtone? Or if he ask a fiſh, will he give him a ſerpent? If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more ſhall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?* Here is a general promiſe and declaration, that upon our humble and earneſt prayer to God, he will grant us whatever is good and neceſſary; by which is certainly intended in the firſt place, ſpiritual good things, becauſe theſe are the beſt and moſt neceſſary; and to ſatisfy us that our Saviour did in the firſt place, and more eſpecially mean theſe, St. Luke does particularly

ly inſtance in the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, Luke xi. 13. *How much more ſhall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them ask him? The Holy Spirit*; that is, the continual preſence and influence of it to all the purpoſes of guidance and direction, of grace and aſſiſtance, of comfort and ſupport in our Chriſtian courſe.

And what elſe is the meaning of that parable of our Saviour's concerning the talents entruſted with every man, according to his capacity and opportunities, Matth. xxv. I ſay, what elſe can be the meaning of it but this; that God is before-hand with every man, by affording the advantages and opportunities of being happy, and ſuch a meaſure of grace and aſſiſtance to that end, which if he faithfully improve, he ſhall be admitted *into the joy of his Lord?*

And upon this conſideration of the gracious promiſes of the goſpel to this purpoſe, it is, that the Apoſtle St. Paul doth ſo earneſtly exhort Chriſtians to endeavour after the higheſt degree of univerſal holineſs and purity, that we are capable of in this life, 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly beloved, let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs in the fear of God.* And ſo likewiſe Phil. ii. 12, 13. *Wherefore, my beloved, work out your own ſalvation with fear and trembling*; (that is, with great care and concernment, leſt you ſhould fall ſhort of it) *for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleaſure.* The conſideration of God's readineſs to aſſiſt us, and of his grace, which is always at hand to ſtir up our wills to that which is good, and to ſtrengthen us in the doing of it, ought to be a great argument and encouragement to us, to put forth our utmoſt endeavours, and ſo co-operate with the grace of God toward our own ſalvation.

And the Apoſtle St. Peter uſeth the ſame argument to preſs men to uſe their utmoſt *diligence, to make their calling and election ſure*, by abounding in all the virtues of a good life, 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that*

that pertain unto life and godlineſs, (that is, hath ſo plentifully furniſhed us with all the requiſites to a godly life) *through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue*; (that is, by knowledge of the goſpel, and the grace therein offered to us) *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes, that by theſe you might be partakers of the divine nature, having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world through luſt.* And then from the conſideration of this divine power, conveyed to us by the goſpel, and the promiſes of it, he exhorts men to *give all diligence, to add to their faith virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godlineſs, and brotherly love and charity.*

And indeed the ſcripture every where aſcribes our regeneration and ſanctification, the beginning, and progreſs, and perſeverance of our obedience, to the powerful grace and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit; we are ſaid to be *regenerated and born again of the Spirit, to be renewed and ſanctified by the Holy Ghoſt, to be led by the Spirit,* and *by the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the fleſh,* and in a word, *to be kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto ſalvation.*

3. What the grace of God is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, may properly be ſaid to be poſſible to us, and in ſome ſenſe, in our power. That may be ſaid to be poſſible to us, which though we *cannot do of ourſelves, as of ourſelves,* (that is, by our own natural power) yet we can do by the help and aſſiſtance of another, if that aſſiſtance be ready to be afforded to us; as we are ſure the grace of God's Holy Spirit is, becauſe he hath promiſed it to them that ſeek it, and *he is faithful who hath promiſed.*

That cannot be ſaid to be wholly out of any man's power, which he may have for asking; that which we are able to do by the ſtrength and aſſiſtance of another, is not impoſſible for us. Surely St. Paul did no ways derogate from the grace of God when he ſaid, *I am able to do all things through Chriſt ſtrengthening me*; he reckons himſelf able to do all that

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which by the ſtrength of Chriſt he was enabled to do.

And this is the true ground of all the perſuaſions and exhortations which we meet with in ſcripture, to holineſs and obedience; which would all be, not only to no purpoſe, but very unreaſonable, if we were wholly deſtitute of power to do what God commands: But if he be always ready at hand to aſſiſt us by a grace ſufficient for us, if he co-operate with us in the work of our ſalvation, then is there abundant ground of encouragement to our endeavours; and if we fall ſhort of eternal ſalvation, it is wholly our own fault: it is not becauſe God is wanting to us in thoſe aids and aſſiſtances of his grace which are neceſſary; but becauſe we are wanting to ourſelves, in not ſeeking God's grace more earneſtly, or by neglecting to make uſe of it when it is afforded to us. For it is really all one, both to the encouragement of our endeavours, and to the rendering of our diſobedience inexcuſable, whether we be able of ourſelves to perform the condition of the goſpel, or God be ready to aſſiſt us by his grace and Holy Spirit to that purpoſe.

Wherefore as the Apoſtle exhorts, Heb. xii. 12, 13, 14, 15. *Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make ſtraight paths for your feet, leſt that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord; looking diligently leſt any man fail of the grace of God*; intimating, that it is want of care and diligence on our part, if the grace of God fail of its end, and be not effectual to all the purpoſes of faith and repentance and obedience. God does not withhold his grace from us; but men may receive it in vain, if they do not make uſe of it. And thus I have done with the third thing I propoſed to conſider from theſe words. I proceed to the

Fourth, viz. To conſider the neceſſity of this obedience, in order to our obtaining of eternal life and happineſs. *Chriſt is the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*; that is, to ſuch, and only to ſuch, as live in obedience to the precepts of

his holy goſpel, to them who frame the general courſe of their lives according to his laws. Some men ſeem to be ſo afraid of the merit of obedience and good works, that they are loth to aſſert the neceſſity of them, and do it with ſo much caution, as if they were not throughly perſuaded of it, or did apprehend ſome dangerous conſequences of it: but this fear is perfectly groundleſs; as if merit could not be excluded, without caſting off our duty, and releaſing ourſelves from any neceſſary obligation to be good. For any man ſurely may eaſily diſcern a plain difference between a worthineſs of deſert, and a fitneſs of receiving a rebel, being penitent and ſorry for what he hath done; though he cannot deſerve a pardon, yet he may thereby be qualified and made meet to receive it; though repentance do not make him worthy, yet it may make him capable of it, which an obſtinate rebel, and one that perſiſts in his diſloyalty, is not. This is a thing ſo plain of itſelf, that it would be waſte of time and words to inſiſt longer upon the proof of it.

Now the neceſſity of obedience, in order to eternal life and happineſs, relies upon theſe three grounds:

1ſt, Upon the conſtitution and appointment of God.

2dly, The general reaſon of rewards.

3dly, Upon the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience.

1ſt, The conſtitution and appointment of God. *Eternal life is the gift of God*; and he may do what he will with his own, he may diſpenſe his gifts and favours upon what terms and conditions he pleaſeth; and therefore if he hath plainly declared, that *to them who by patient continuance in well doing, ſeek for glory, and honour, and immortality, he will give eternal life; that without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord; but if we have our fruit unto holineſs, our end ſhall be everlaſting life*; who ſhall reſiſt his will, or diſpute his pleaſure? The right and authority of God in this matter is ſo unqueſtionable, that it admits of no conteſt; and the bleſſings and benefits propoſed, are ſo infinitely great and invaluable, that no condition of obtaining them, which is poſſible to be

be performed by us, can be thought hard and unequal; ſo that we ought thankfully to receive ſo great a favour, let the terms and conditions of it be what they will: and if there were no other reaſon for the impoſing of theſe conditions upon us, of faith, and repentance, and obedience, but merely the will and pleaſure of God, this were enough to ſilence all objections againſt it.

But *2dly*, The neceſſity of obedience in order to eternal life, is likewiſe founded in the reaſon of rewards in general. For though the meaſure and degree of our reward, ſo infinitely beyond the proportion of our beſt duty and ſervice, as eternal life and happineſs is, I ſay, though the meaſure and degree of this reward be founded in the immenſe bounty and goodneſs of God, yet the reaſon of reward in general, is neceſſarily founded in our obedience to God's laws; for according to the true nature and reaſon of things, nothing but obedience is capable of reward. For though authority may pardon the breach and tranſgreſſion of laws, and remit the puniſhment due thereto, yet to reward the contempt of laws, and wilful diſobedience to them, is directly contrary to the deſign of government, and does plainly overthrow the very reaſon and end of all laws, and makes obedience and diſobedience to be all one; if ſo be, they are equally capable of reward: and therefore nothing can be more abſurd and ſenſeleſs, than for any man to hope to be rewarded by God, who does not live in a ſincere obedience to his laws. *Every man that hath this hope in him,* (that is, in Chriſt Jeſus, to be ſaved by him) *purifieth himſelf, even as he is pure*; that is, endeavours to be like him in the purity and obedience of his life: and nothing ſurely can be more unreaſonable than to expect to be rewarded by the great Governor and Judge of the world, if we be diſobedient to his laws; for where obedience to law is refuſed, there all reaſon and equity of reward ceaſeth. No wiſe Prince can think fit to reward diſloyalty and contempt of his laws; becauſe to reward it would

be to encourage it; much leſs will God, the great and infinitely wiſe Governor of the world.

3*dly*, The neceſſity of obedience will yet more evidently appear, if we conſider the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience. The happineſs of heaven, which is the reward promiſed in the goſpel, is deſcribed to us by the ſight and enjoyment of God. Now to render us capable of this bleſſed reward, it is neceſſary that we be like God; but nothing but obedience and holineſs, and *being renewed after the image of him who created us in righteouſneſs*, can make us like to God. For he that would be like God muſt be holy, and juſt, and good, and patient, and merciful, as God is; and this alone can make us capable of the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of God; for unleſs *we be like him*, we cannot *ſee him as he is*, and if we ſhould be admitted into heaven, we could not find any pleaſure and happineſs in communion with him. *Bleſſed are the pure in heart*, (ſays our Saviour) *for they ſhall ſee God. Without holineſs* (ſays the Apoſtle) *no man ſee ſhall the Lord.* And indeed, it is in the very nature of the thing impoſſible, that a wicked man (whilſt he remains ſo) ſhould ever be happy, becauſe there can be no agreeable and delightful ſociety between thoſe that are of a quite contrary temper and diſpoſition to one another, between him *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, and a ſinful and impure creature. For *what fellowſhip* (ſaith the Apoſtle) *can righteouſneſs have with unrighteouſneſs? what communion hath light with darkneſs, or God with Belial?* that is, with the wicked and diſobedient. Till we become like to God in the frame and temper of our minds, there can be no happy ſociety between him and us; we could neither delight ourſelves in God, nor he take any pleaſure in us; for *he is not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with him. The wicked ſhall not ſtand in his ſight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity.* It cannot be otherwiſe, but that there muſt be an eternal jarring and diſcord between the righteous and holy God, and wicked and unrighteous men.

I will behold thy face (ſays David) *in righteouſneſs.* There is no looking God in the face upon any other terms. If we have been *workers of iniquity*, God will caſt us out of his ſight, and in great anger bid us to *depart from him*; and we alſo ſhall deſire him to *depart from us*, being unable to bear the ſight of him.

So that there is great reaſon why holineſs and obedience ſhould be made the conditions of eternal life and happineſs, ſince in the very nature of the thing it is ſo neceſſary a qualification for the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of God, who to us is the cauſe and fountain of happineſs. I come in the

Fifth and laſt place, To ſhew that this method and means of our ſalvation is no prejudice to the law of faith, and to the free grace and mercy of God declared in the goſpel. The goſpel is called the law of faith, and the law of grace, in oppoſition to the Jewiſh diſpenſation, which is called the law, or covenant of works, becauſe it conſiſteth ſo much in external rites and obſervances, which were but types and *ſhadows of good things to come*, (as the Apoſtle calls them in this epiſtle) and which when they were come, that law did expire of itſelf, and was out of date; the obligation and obſervance of it was no longer neceſſary; but *a better covenant, which was eſtabliſhed upon better promiſes*, came in the place of it, and men were *juſtified by faith*, that is, by ſincerely embracing the Chriſtian religion, and were no longer under an obligation to that external, and ſervile, and imperfect diſpenſation, which conſiſted in circumciſion, and in almoſt an endleſs number of external ceremonies. Theſe are the works of the law ſo often ſpoken of by St. Paul, concerning which the Jews had not only an opinion of the neceſſity of them to a man's juſtification and ſalvation, but likewiſe of the merit of them; in oppoſition to both which opinions, St. Paul calls the covenant of the goſpel the law of faith, and the law of grace.

But there is no where the leaſt intimation given, either by our Saviour or his Apoſtles, that obedience to the precepts of the goſpel (which are in ſubſtance

the moral law cleared and perfected) is not neceſſary to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life; but on the contrary, it is our Saviour's expreſs direction to the young man, who asked, *what good things he ſhould do, that he might obtain eternal life? If thou wilt* (ſays he) *enter into life, keep the commandments:* And that he might underſtand what commandments he meant, he inſtanceth in the precepts of the moral law. And indeed, the whole tenor of our Saviour's ſermons, and the precepts and writings of the Apoſtles, are full and expreſs to this purpoſe. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine,* (that is, *theſe precepts which I have delivered) and doth them not, I will liken him to a fooliſh man, who built his houſe upon the ſand; and the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. If ye know theſe things, happy are ye, if ye do them. In every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted of him. In Jeſus Chriſt, neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but faith, that is acted and inſpired by charity.* And that the Apoſtle here means, *that charity* or *love*, which is the fulfilling of the law, is evident from what he ſays elſewhere, that *neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but the keeping of the commandments of God.* In which text it is plain, that the Apoſtle ſpeaks of the terms of our juſtification, and what is available with God to that purpoſe. And St. James to the ſame purpoſe, tells us, that *by the works of obedience our faith is made perfect*; and that *faith without works is dead:* and ſurely a dead faith will neither juſtify nor ſave any man. St. John likewiſe very earneſtly cautions us to take heed of any ſuch doctrine, as would take away the neceſſity of righteouſneſs and obedience; *Little children* (ſays he) *let no man deceive you; he that doth righteouſneſs, is righteous, as he is righteous.* To all which I ſhall only add the plain

plain words of my text, that *Chriſt became the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him.*

So that no man hath reaſon to fear, that this doctrine of the neceſſity of obedience to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life, ſhould be any ways prejudicial to the law of faith, and the law of grace. For, ſo long as theſe three things are but aſſerted and ſecured;

1*ſt*, That faith is the root and principle of obedience and a holy life, and that *without it, it is impoſſible to pleaſe God.*

2*dly*, That we ſtand continually in need of the divine grace and aſſiſtance to enable us to perform that obedience which the goſpel requires of us, and is pleaſed to accept in order to eternal life. And,

3*dly*, That the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and the reward of eternal life, are founded in the free grace and mercy of God, conferring theſe bleſſings upon us, not for the merit of our obedience, but only for the merit and ſatisfaction of the obedience and ſufferings of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer: I ſay, ſo long as we aſſert theſe three things, we give all that the goſpel any where aſcribes to faith, and to the grace of God revealed in the goſpel.

I have been careful to expreſs theſe things more fully and diſtinctly, that no man may imagine, that whilſt we aſſert the neceſſity of obedience and a holy life, we have any deſign to derogate in the leaſt from the faith and the grace of God; but only to engage and encourage men to holineſs and a good life, by convincing them of the abſolute and indiſpenſable neceſſity of it, in order to eternal ſalvation. For all that I have ſaid, is in plain Engliſh no more but this, that it is neceſſary for a man to be a good man, that he may get to heaven; and whoever finds fault with this doctrine, finds fault with the goſpel itſelf, and the main end and deſign of the grace of God therein revealed to mankind, which offers ſalvation to men upon no other terms than theſe which I have mentioned: And to preach and preſs this doctrine, is certainly, if any thing in the world can be ſo, to purſue the great end and deſign of the Chriſtian religion.

ligion, ſo plainly and expreſly declared by St. Paul, Tit. ii. 11, 12. *The grace of God that bringeth ſalvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent world.* And if the grace of God declared in the goſpel have this effect upon us, then we may with confidence *wait for the bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works*; and then he adds, *Theſe things teach and exhort, and rebuke with all authority*; that is, declare and inculcate this doctrine, and rebuke ſeverely thoſe who teach or practiſe contrary to it. And he repeats it again with a more vehement charge to Titus, to preſs upon men the neceſſity of obedience and good works, chap. iii. 8. *This is a faithful ſaying, and theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they who have believed in God, be careful to maintain good works.*

All that now remains, is to make ſome uſeful inferences from what hath been ſaid upon this argument, and ſo to conclude this diſcourſe.

Firſt of all, To convince us that an empty profeſſion of the Chriſtian religion, how ſpecious and glorious ſoever it be, if it be deſtitute of the fruits of obedience and a holy life, will by no means avail to bring us to heaven. No profeſſion of faith in Chriſt, no ſubjection to him, though we be baptized in his name, and liſt ourſelves in the number of his diſciples and followers, though we have made a conſtant profeſſion of all the articles of the Chriſtian faith, and have performed all the external parts and duties of religion, have gone conſtantly to church, and frequented the ſervice of God, and have joined in publick prayers to God with great appearance of devotion, and have heard his word with great reverence and attention, and received the bleſſed ſacrament with all imaginable expreſſions of love and gratitude to our bleſſed Redeemer; nay, though we had heard our bleſſed Saviour himſelf teach in our ſtreets, and had

had eaten and drunken in his presence; yet if all this while we have not done the will of God, and obeyed his laws, none of all these things will signify any thing to bring us to heaven, and make us partakers of that salvation, which he hath purchased for mankind.

But we cannot plead so much for ourselves, as those did, of whom our Saviour speaks. None of us shall be able to alledge for ourselves at the great day, that *we had prophesied in his name, and in his name had cast out devils, and in his name had done many wonderful works*; and yet if we could alledge all this, it would do us no good. All that such can say for themselves is, that they have called him Lord, Lord: that is, they have made profession of his religion, and been called by his name; that they have paid an outward honour and respect to him, and declared a mighty love and affection for him: but *they have not done his will*, but *have hated to be reformed, and have cast his commandments behind their backs*; they have only born the leaves of an outward profession, but *have brought forth no fruit unto holiness*, and therefore can have no reasonable expectation, that their end should be everlasting life. So that when these men shall appear before the great and terrible Judge of the world, they shall have nothing to say but those vain words, *Lord, Lord*: To which our Saviour will answer in that day, *why call ye me Lord, Lord, when ye would not do the things which I said?* Notwithstanding all your profession of faith in me, and subjection to me, *ye have been workers of iniquity, therefore depart from me, I know you not whence ye are.*

Secondly, The consideration of what hath been said, should stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of what the author of our salvation hath done for us. And there is great reason for thankfulness, whether we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, or the way and manner in which it was purchased, or the easy and reasonable terms upon which it may be obtained.

1st, If we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, and that is salvation, eternal salvation,

vation, which comprehends in it all the bleſſings and benefits of the goſpel, both the means and the end, our happineſs, and the way to it, by *ſaving us from our ſins*; from the guilt of them, by our juſtification in the blood of Chriſt; and from the power and dominion of them, by the ſanctifying grace and virtue of the Holy Ghoſt.

And it comprehends the end, our deliverance from hell and the wrath to come, and the beſtowing of happineſs upon us, a great and laſting happineſs, great as our wiſhes, and immortal as our ſouls; all this is comprehended in eternal ſalvation.

2*dly*, If we conſider the way and manner in which this great benefit was purchaſed and procured for us, in a way of infinite kindneſs and condeſcenſion, in the loweſt humiliation, and the unparalleled ſufferings of the Son of God; for *never was there any ſorrow like unto his ſorrow, wherewith the Lord afflicted him, in the day of his fierce anger; in his taking upon him the form of a ſervant*, and the perſon of a ſinner, and his *becoming obedient to death, even the death of the croſs*, which was the puniſhment of the vileſt ſlaves, and the moſt heinous malefactors. The Son of God came down from heaven, from the higheſt pitch of glory and happineſs, into this lower world, this *vale of tears*, and ſink of ſin and ſorrow; and was contented himſelf to ſuffer, to ſave us from eternal ruin; to be the moſt deſpicable, and the moſt miſerable man that ever was, that he might raiſe us to glory and honour, and advance us to a ſtate of the greateſt happineſs that human nature is capable of.

3*dly*, If we conſider the eaſy and reaſonable terms upon which we may be made partakers of this unſpeakable benefit, and that is by a conſtant and ſincere and univerſal obedience to the laws of God, which ſuppoſeth repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as the root and principle of all the virtues of a good life; that is, by doing that which beſt becomes us, and which is moſt agreeable to the original frame of our nature, and to the dictates of our reaſon, and which, ſetting aſide the conſideration of our reward, is really beſt for our pre-

present benefit and advantage, our comfort and happiness, even in this world; for God, in giving laws to us, hath imposed nothing upon us, but what in all reason ought to have been our choice, if he had not imposed it; nothing but what is for our good, and is in its own nature necessary to make us capable of that happiness which he hath promised to us. And what can be more gracious than to make one benefit the condition of a greater? than to promise to make us happy for ever, if we will but do that which upon all accounts is really best, and most for our advantage in this present life?

Thirdly, Here is abundant encouragement given to our obedience; we have the divine assistance promised to us, to enable us to the performance of the most difficult parts of our duty: We have the holy Spirit of God to help our infirmities, to excite us to that which is good, and to help and strengthen us in the doing of it.

For our further encouragement, we are assured of the divine acceptance in case of our sincere obedience, notwithstanding the manifold failings and imperfections of it, for the sake of the perfect righteousness and obedience, and the meritorious sufferings of our blessed Saviour: And though *when we have done all we can do, we are unprofitable servants*, and have done nothing but what was our duty, yet God is pleased to accept what we can do, because it is sincere, and to forgive the defects and imperfections of our obedience, for his sake, who *fulfilled all righteousness*.

And besides all this, we have the encouragement of a great and everlasting reward, infinitely beyond all proportion of any service and obedience that we can perform. And if God be ready to assist and strengthen us in the doing of our duty, and be willing so graciously to accept and to reward at such a rate the sincerity of our endeavours to please him, notwithstanding all the failings and imperfections of our best service and obedience, what can we possibly desire more for our encouragement to *patient con-*

continuance in well-doing, and to be *ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, and abundant in the work of the Lord?*

Fourthly, and *laſtly*, The conſideration of what hath been ſaid upon this argument may ſerve ſeverely to rebuke the groundleſs preſumption of thoſe who rely with ſo much confidence upon Chriſt for eternal ſalvation, without any conſcience or care to keep his commandments; as if ſalvation lay upon his hands, and he knew not how to diſpoſe of it, and were glad of any one that would come and take it off upon any terms. No, *he came to ſave us from our ſins, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

So that the ſalvation which he hath purchaſed for us, doth neceſſarily imply our forſaking of our ſins, and returning to God and our duty, and his death and ſufferings are not more an argument of his great love to mankind, than they are a demonſtration of his perfect hatred of ſin. So that if we continue in the love and practice of ſin, we defeat the whole deſign of his coming into the world, and of all that he hath done and ſuffered for us; and the redemption which Chriſt hath wrought for us will not avail us in the leaſt. *Salvation is far from the wicked*, (ſays David, Pſal. cxix. 155.) If we have been workers of iniquity, the Saviour of the world when he comes to judge it, will bid us *to depart from him.*

From all that hath been ſaid, it is evident, that it is the greateſt preſumption in the world for any man to hope to obtain eternal ſalvation by any device whatſoever, or in the communion of any church whatſoever, without obedience and a holy life. For though our obedience cannot merit; yet it is neceſſary to qualify and diſpoſe us for it: Though it does not make us ſtrictly worthy; yet it makes us *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light.*

SER-

SERMON CXXIV.

The authority of Jeſus Chriſt, with the commiſſion and promiſe which he gave to his Apoſtles.

MATTH. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

And Jeſus came and ſpake unto them, ſaying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt: Teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you: And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

THESE words are the laſt that our bleſſed Saviour ſpake to his Apoſtles, immediately before his aſcenſion into heaven; and there are theſe three things contained in them:

I. A declaration of his own authority; *All power is given unto me* both *in heaven and in earth.*

II. A Commiſſion to his diſciples, grounded upon that authority; *Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt: teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you.*

III. A promiſe to encourage them in this work; *And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*

I. Here is our Saviour's declaration of his own authority; *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.* Here is an unlimited power and authority given him over all creatures in heaven and earth. This the ſcripture tells us, was conferred upon him, as a reward of his ſufferings; Phil. ii. 8, 9, 10. *He humbled himſelf, and became obedient unto death, even*

the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; that is, that all creatures, angels and men, and devils, should do homage, and acknowledge subjection to him.

II. Here is the commission he gave to his Apostles by virtue of this authority; *Go ye therefore and teach all nations.* The commission which he here gives, is founded in the authority he had before received. Having all power committed to him, he constitutes and appoints the Apostles and their successors to manage the affairs of this his spiritual kingdom upon earth. And this seems to be the same commission, which St. John mentions in other words, John xx. 21. *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*; that is, as my Father commissioned me before, so now having received full authority from him, I commission you.

Now in this commission, which our Saviour gave to his disciples, I shall take notice,

First, Of the general import and design of it.

Secondly, A more particular declaration how they were to manage this design.

First, The general import and design of this commission, *Go ye and teach all nations.* The word which we translate teach, is μαθητεύσατε, disciple all nations; endeavour to make all the world Christians. One would think here was a power plainly enough given them, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. Which will more fully appear, if we compare this passage in St. Matthew with the other Evangelists. St. Mark, chap. xvi. 15. hath it; *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* From which text I suppose St. Francis thought himself bound to preach to beasts and birds, and accordingly did it very often. and with wonderful success, as they tell us in the legend of his life. But to extend our Saviour's commission so far, is want of common sense; in which St. Francis (though they tell

tell us he had other gifts and graces to an eminent degree) was plainly defective.

But to proceed, St. Luke, chap. xxiv. 47. tells us, our Saviour commanded, *That repentance and remiſſion of ſins ſhould be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jeruſalem.* So that their commiſſion did plainly extend to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews; only they were to begin with the Jews, and to preach the goſpel firſt to them, and when they had gone over Judea and Samaria, then to paſs to other nations, as St. Luke doth moſt expreſly declare, Acts i. 8. *Ye ſhall receive power, after that the Holy Ghoſt is come upon you, and ye ſhall be witneſſes unto me, both in Jeruſalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermoſt parts of the earth.*

But ſee the ſtrange power of prejudice, to blind the eyes even of good men, in the plaineſt matters. The diſciples of our Saviour, for all they had entertained a new religion, yet they retained the old pride and prejudice of their nation againſt the reſt of the world; as if none but themſelves had any ſhare in the favour of God, or were to have any part in the ſalvation of the Meſſias.

Our Saviour did ſo far conſider this prejudice of theirs, that he never in his lifetime acquainted them with this matter, ſo as to make them fully to underſtand it, becauſe they were not able to bear it. And it is very probable, that this is one of thoſe things which our Saviour meant, John xvi. 12, 13. *I have yet many things to ſay unto you; but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.* That is, he ſhould lead them into the knowledge of thoſe truths of which they were not then capable. And though our Saviour, after his reſurrection, ſeems to have declared this ſufficiently to them; yet by their practice after his aſcenſion, it appears that they underſtood all this only of the Jews, namely, that they were to preach the goſpel firſt to the Jews that were at Jeruſalem, and in Judea, and then to thoſe that were diſperſed in other nations: for it is clear from the

hiſtory of their firſt preaching recorded in the Acts, that they preached to none but to the Jews, and the proſelytes of the Jewiſh religion. So ſtrong was their prejudice, that they had not the leaſt ſuſpicion that this bleſſing of the goſpel was intended for the heathen world; nor were they convinced to the contrary, till St. Peter had a ſpecial viſion and revelation to this purpoſe, and the Holy Ghoſt came upon the Gentiles in miraculous gifts, as he had done before upon the Jews that were converted to Chriſtianity. And thus the Spirit of God *led them into this truth*, and then they underſtood this command of our Savour's in a larger ſenſe. And to this St. Peter plainly refers, Acts x. 42. where he tells us, how that Chriſt after his reſurrection appeared to them, and *commanded them to preach unto the people*. So likewiſe do Paul and Barnabas, Acts xiii. 46. where they ſpeak thus to the Jews, *it was neceſſary that the word ſhould firſt be preached to you; but ſeeing you put it from you, lo, we turn to the Gentiles, for ſo hath the Lord commanded us*. Now he no where commanded this, but in this commiſſion, which he gave them before his aſcenſion.

Secondly, You have here a particular declaration, how they were to manage this work of making diſciples to the Chriſtian religion:

1. By baptizing them into the Chriſtian faith.

2. By inſtructing them in the precepts and practices of a Chriſtian life.

1. By baptizing them into the Chriſtian faith, which is here called *baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt*. Baptiſm is a ſolemn rite appointed by our Savour for the initiating perſons into the Chriſtian religion: But it was a ceremony in uſe before, both among the Jews and Gentiles. The Heathen obſerved it at the initiating perſons into their religious myſteries; and the Jews, when they admitted proſelytes to their religion; at which time males (as Maimonides tells us) were both circumciſed and baptized, the women were only baptized. One circumſtance of the baptiſm of grown perſons was, that ſtanding in the water up

to

to the neck, they received several precepts of the law. And as the Jewish writers further tell us, this ceremony did not only belong to them that were of grown years, but to the children of the proselytes, if it were desired, upon condition, that when they came to years they should continue in that religion.

Now though this was a religious ceremony used both by Jews and Gentiles, and without any divine institution that we know of, our blessed Saviour (who in none of his institutions seems to have favoured unnecessary innovations) was so far from the superstition of declining it upon this account, that it had been in religious use both among Jews and Gentiles, that he seems the rather to have chosen it for that very reason. For seeing it was a common rite of all religions, and in itself very significant of that purity which is the great design of all religion, it was the more likely to find the easier acceptance, and to be most suitable to that, which he intended to be the universal religion of the world.

As for the form of baptism, *in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, it plainly refers to that short creed, or profession of faith, which was required of those that were to be baptized, answerably to the reciting of the precepts of the law, at the baptizing of proselytes among the *Jews*: Now the articles of this creed were reduced to these three heads, *of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, and contains what was necessary to be believed concerning each of these. And this probably is that which the Apostle calls the doctrine of baptism, *Heb.* vi. 2. *viz.* a short summary of the Christian faith, the profession whereof was to be made at baptism; of which the most ancient fathers make so frequent mention, calling it *the rule of faith*. It was a great while indeed before Christians tied themselves strictly to that very form of words, which we now call the Apostles creed; but the sense was the same, though every one expresst it in his own words; nay, the same father reciting it upon several occasions, does not confine himself to the very same expressions: A plain indication that they were not then strictly bound

up to any form of words, but retaining the sense and substance of the articles, every one expressed them as he pleased. So that *to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,* is to perform this rite or sacrament by the authority of, and with special relation to the three persons of the blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as the chief objects of the Christian faith, whereof solemn profession was then made. So that upon this form of baptism appointed by our Saviour, compared with what is elsewhere said in scripture concerning the divinity of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is principally founded the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, I mean, in that simplicity in which the scripture hath delivered it, and not as it hath been since confounded and intangled in the cobwebs and niceties of the schools. The scripture indeed no where calls them persons, but speaks of them as we do of several persons; and therefore that word is not unfitly used to express the difference between them, or at least we do not know a fitter word for that purpose.

By *baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,* is meant, the initiating of men by this solemn rite and ceremony into the Christian religion, upon their profession of the necessary doctrines of it, concerning the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and a solemn stipulation and engagement to live according to those doctrines: Which promise of a suitable life and practice was likewise made at the same time, as Justin Martyr, and other of the ancient Fathers do testify.

But before I leave this head, it is very fit to take particular notice what use the Anabaptists make of this text, so as in effect to lay the whole stress of their cause upon it, as if by virtue of this command of our Saviour's, and the manner wherein it is expressed, all infants, even those of Christian parents, who are themselves already admitted into the new covenant of the gospel, were excluded from baptism; because it is here said by our Savour, *Go ye and disciple all nations, baptizing them*; from whence they infer, (and very clearly and strongly as they think)

think) that none are to be baptized, but ſuch as are firſt thoroughly inſtructed in the Chriſtian religion, and made diſciples, which infants are not, but only thoſe who are grown to ſome maturity of years and underſtanding: But the opinion and practice of the ancient church in this matter, is a ſufficient bar to this inference, at leaſt to the clearneſs of it. And indeed it cannot reaſonably be imagined, that the Apoſtles, who had all of them been bred up in the Jewiſh religion, which conſtantly, and by virtue of a divine precept and inſtitution, admitted infants into that church, and to the benefits of that covenant, by the rite of circumciſion, and likewiſe the infants of proſelytes by baptiſm, (as I obſerved before) I ſay no man can reaſonably imagine, that the Apoſtles could underſtand our Saviour, as intending by any conſequence from this text, to exclude the children of Chriſtians out of the Chriſtian church, and to debar them of the benefits of the new covenant of the goſpel: The children of Chriſtians being every whit as capable of being taken into this new covenant and of partaking of the benefits of it, as children of the Jews were of being admitted into the old. Unleſs we will ſuppoſe (which at firſt ſight ſeems very harſh and unreaſonable) that by the terms of the Chriſtian religion, children are in a much worſe condition, than the children of the Jews were under the law. So that the parity of reaſon being ſo plain, nothing leſs than an expreſs prohibition from our Saviour, and an exception of children from baptiſm, can be thought ſufficient to deprive the children of Chriſtians of any privilege, of which the Jewiſh were capable. For the plain meaning of this commiſſion to the Apoſtles is, to go and *proſelyte all nations to the Chriſtian religion*, and to admit them ſolemnly into it by baptiſm; as the Jews were wont to proſelyte men to their religion by circumciſion and baptiſm; by which rites alſo they took in the children of the proſelytes, upon promiſe that when they came to years they ſhould continue in that religion. And if this was our Saviour's meaning, the Apoſtles had no reaſon from the tenor of their com-

commiſſion, to underſtand that the children of Chriſtian proſelytes were any more excluded, than the children of proſelytes to the Jewiſh religion, unleſs our Saviour had expreſly excepted them; for it is a favourable caſe, and in a matter of privilege, and therefore ought not to be determined to debar children of it, upon any obſcure conſequence from a text, which it is certain was never ſo underſtood by the Chriſtian church for 1500 years together. I have done with the firſt part of their commiſſion, which was to diſciple or proſelyte all nations to the Chriſtian religion, and to admit them into the Chriſtian church, by the rite or ſacrament of baptiſm. I proceed to conſider the

Second part of their commiſſion, which was to inſtruct men in the precepts and duties of a Chriſtian life, *teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you.* You ſee how their commiſſion bounds and limits them; they were to teach others thoſe precepts which Chriſt had taught and delivered to them; they had no power by virtue of this commiſſion to make new laws, which ſhould be of univerſal and perpetual obligation, and conſequently neceſſary to the ſalvation of all Chriſtians; they were only to be the publiſhers, but not the authors of this new religion. And therefore St. Paul, when the Corinthians conſulted him about ſeveral things relating to marriage and virginity, he only gives his advice, but would not take upon him to make a law in thoſe caſes that ſhould be binding to all Chriſtians. And for the ſame reaſon Chriſtians do generally at this day think themſelves abſolved from the obligation of that canon, which was made even in a council of the apoſtles, as to all thoſe branches of it, the reaſon whereof is now ceaſed. But nothwithſtanding this, the authority which our Saviour conferred upon his Apoſtles to teach his doctrine, does in the nature of it neceſſarily imply a power of governing the ſocieties of Chriſtians, under ſuch officers, and by ſuch rules as are moſt ſuitable to the nature of ſuch a ſociety, and moſt fit to promote the great ends of the Chriſtian religion: For without this power of governing, they can-

cannot be ſuppoſed to be endued with ſufficient authority to teach; and therefore in purſuance of this commiſſion, we find that the Apoſtles did govern the ſocieties of Chriſtians by ſuch rules and conſtitutions, as were fitted to the then preſent circumſtances of Chriſtianity. And as they did appoint temporary officers upon emergent occaſions, ſo they conſtituted others that were of perpetual uſe in the church, for the inſtructing and governing of Chriſtians; and that in ſuch a ſubordination to one another, as would be moſt effectual to the attaining of the end of government: which ſubordination of governors, hath not only been uſed in all religions, but in all the well-regulated civil ſocieties that ever were in the world. And this may ſuffice to have ſpoken of the ſecond part of their commiſſion.

The third and laſt thing in the text, is the promiſe which our Saviour here makes for the encouragement of the Apoſtles in this work; *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*; that is, though I be going from you in perſon, yet I will ſtill be preſent with you by my power and ſpirit. And ſurely this muſt needs be a great encouragement to have him engaged for their aſſiſtance, who had all power in heaven and earth committed to him, as he tells them at the 18th verſe.

I ſhall endeavour therefore, as far as the time will permit, to explain to you the true meaning and extent of this promiſe. That it is primarily made to the Apoſtles, no man can doubt, that conſiders, that it was ſpoken to them immediately by our Saviour: and in regard to them, the meaning of it is plainly this, that our Saviour would ſend down the Holy Ghoſt upon them, in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the more ſpeedy planting and propagating of the goſpel in the world, and that he would be with them, and aſſiſt them extraordinarily in this work.

And that this is the primary meaning of it, in regard to the Apoſtles, will be very plain, by conſidering how this promiſe is expreſt by the other Evangeliſts; Mark xvi. 17. inſtead of this promiſe, you have theſe words immediately after our Saviour had given them

them commission to go and preach the gospel, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.* And then it follows, *These signs shall follow them that believe; in my name they shall cast out devils, and shall speak with new tongues.* And Luke xxiv. 49. instead of, *Lo, I am with you,* it is said, *Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you*; that is, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost; for it follows in the next words, *But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.* This St. Luke himself interprets of the promise of the Holy Ghost, Acts i. 4, 5. *He commanded them, that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence.* And ver. 8. *Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.* So that no man that compares these texts together, can doubt, but that this was the primary meaning of this promise, as it was made to the Apostles.

But then it is as plain likewise, that this promise is to be extended farther than to the persons of the Apostles, even to all those that should afterwards succeed them in this work of preaching the gospel, and baptizing, because our Saviour adds, *that he would be with them to the end of the world*; which words, because they reach far beyond the Apostles times, (as I shall shew by and by) must be necessarily extended to such persons in after-ages, as should carry on the same work.

There are two famous controversies about the sense of these words, in which this promise is expressed:

The first is, concerning the circumstance of time mentioned in this promise, *alway, to the end of the world.*

The

The other concerning the ſubſtance of the promiſe itſelf, what is meant by our Saviour's being with them. In the *firſt* we have to deal with the Enthuſiaſts; in the latter with the Papiſts. I ſhall examine the pretences of both theſe, as briefly and plainly as I can.

Firſt, Concerning the circumſtance of time expreſt in theſe words, *Alway, to the end of the world.* The Enthuſiaſts would perſuade us, that the meaning of theſe phraſes is not to be extended beyond that age, and that this promiſe is to be limited to the Apoſtles perſons, and that the ſenſe of it is, that Chriſt would be with the Apoſtles πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, all their days, ſo long as they ſhould live, and that would be, ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος to the end of that age; thus they tranſlate it, and with no worſe deſign than to take away the neceſſity of a goſpel-miniſtry.

But this pretence will vaniſh, if we can make good theſe two things:

1. That the letter of this promiſe extends further than the perſons of the Apoſtles, and the continuance of that age.

2. However that be, it is certain that the reaſon of it extends to all that ſhould ſucceed them in their miniſtry, to the end of the world.

1. The letter of this promiſe extends farther than the perſons of the Apoſtles, and the continuance of that age. I will eaſily grant that the phraſe πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, ſignifies only continually; I will be with you continually; but then the other phraſe ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, *until the end of the world*, is ſeveral times in ſcripture undeniably uſed for the end and diſſolution of all things, and cannot with any probability be ſhewen to be ever uſed otherwiſe. In this ſenſe it is unqueſtionably uſed three times, Matth. xiii. *The harveſt is the end of the world*, ver. 39. *So ſhall it be at the end of the world*, ver. 40. and ver. 49. it is ſaid, that at *the end of the world, the Angels ſhall come forth, and ſever the wicked from the juſt, and caſt them into the furnace*; which muſt either be underſtood of the end of the world, and of the day of judgment, or there will be no clear text in the

the whole Bible to that purpose; and it is very probable, that this phrase is used in the same sense, Matth. xxiv. 3. where the disciples ask our Saviour, *What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?* as will appear to any one that considers our Saviour's answer to this question; the latter part whereof cannot, without too much violence, be accommodated to any thing but the final dissolution of the world. Now if this phrase be every where else in scripture used in this sense, there is no reason why it should be taken otherwise in the text, only to serve the purpose of an unreasonable opinion.

I know there are phrases very near a-kin to this, which are used in a quite different sense, namely, for the expiration of the Jewish state: and that we may know how to distinguish them, it is observable, that when the scripture speaks of *the end of the world*, it is called συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος, the end of the age, in the singular number; but when it speaks of the times before the gospel, it always expresseth them in the plural: the reason of which is, that famous tradition among the Jews, of the house of Elias, which distributed the whole duration of the world into three ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the Messias; and this last age they looked on with great difference from the rest, as the famous and glorious age, which was to be as it were the beginning of a new world: And therefore the Jews in their writings constantly call it the *seculum futurum*, the age, or the world to come: And therefore the Apostle, in this epistle to the Hebrews, calls the state of the gospel by that name, as best known to them, Heb. ii. 5. *But unto the Angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we now speak*; that is, the law was given by the disposition of Angels, but the dispensation of the gospel, which is called *the world to come*, was managed and administred by the Son of God. So likewise Heb. vi. 5. those miraculous powers which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel, are called δυνάμεις τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, *the powers of the world to come*, that is, of the gospel-age.

So

So that this laſt age of the goſpel, is that which the ſcripture by way of eminency calls the age; thoſe that went before are conſtantly called *αἰῶνες*, the ages, in the plural number. So we find, Eph. iii. 9. the goſpel is called *the diſpenſation of the myſtery that was hid in God, ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων, from ages*; and you have the ſame phraſe, Col. i. 26. Upon the ſame account, the expiration of the Jewiſh ſtate is in ſcripture called *the laſt times*, and *the laſt days*, Heb. i. 2. *But in theſe laſt days, God hath ſpoken unto us by his Son.* 1 Cor. x. 11. *Theſe things are written for our admonition, upon whom τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων, the ends of the ages are come.* In the ſame ſenſe the Apoſtle, Heb. ix. 26. ſpeaking of Chriſt, ſays, that *he appeared ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων, at the end of the ages*, to take away ſin; that is, at the concluſion of the ages which had gone before, in the laſt age. So that if we will be governed in the interpretation of this text, by the conſtant uſe of this phraſe in ſcripture, the letter of this promiſe will extend to the end of the world.

2. But however this be, it is certain that the reaſon of this promiſe does extend to all thoſe that ſhould ſucceed the Apoſtles in their miniſtry, to the end of the world: I will ſuppoſe now (to give the adverſaries their utmoſt ſcope) that which we have no reaſon to grant, that the letter of this promiſe reacheth only to the Apoſtles and their age, and that our Saviour's meaning was no more but this, that he would ſend down the Holy Ghoſt upon them in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the ſpeedy planting and propagating of the goſpel in the world, and that he would be with them till this work was done. Now ſuppoſing there were nothing more than this intended in the letter of it, this ought not much to trouble us, ſo long as it is certain, that the reaſon of it does extend to the ſucceſſors of the Apoſtles in all ages of the world. I do not mean, that the reaſon of this promiſe does give us ſufficient aſſurance, that God will aſſiſt the Teachers and Governors of his church in all ages, in the ſame extraordinary manner as he did the Apoſtles,

because there is not the like reason and necessity for it; but that we have sufficient assurance from the reason of this promise, that God will not be wanting to us, in such fitting and necessary assistance, as the state of religion, and the welfare of it in every age shall require. For can we imagine that God will use such extraordinary means to plant a religion in the world, and take no care of it afterwards? That he who had begun so good a work, so great and glorious a design, would let it fall to the ground for want of any thing that was necessary to the support of it?

This is reasonable in itself; but we are not also without good ground for thus extending the general reason of particular promises beyond the letter of them. The Apostle hath gone before us in this, for Heb. xiii. 5, 6. he there extends two particular promises of the Old Testament to all Christians, *Let your conversation* (says he) *be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* And again, *The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me.* These promises were made to particular persons; the first of them to Joshua, and the other to David; but yet the Apostle applies them to all Christians, and to good men in all ages, because the general ground and reason of them extended so far. He who gave Joshua and David this encouragement to their duty, will certainly be as good to us, if we do ours.

And thus I have done with the first controversy about the sense of these words, which concerns the circumstance of time mentioned in this promise, *alway, to the end of the world*, and have plainly shewn, that both the letter and the reason of this promise does extend further than the persons of the Apostles, and the continuance of that age, even to all that should succeed them in their ministry *to the end of the world.* I come now to consider,

Secondly, The substance of the promise itself, namely, what is meant by our Saviour's *being with them.* And here our adversaries of the church of Rome would

would fain perſuade us, that this promiſe is made to the church of Rome, and that the meaning of it is, that that church ſhould always be infallible, and never err in the faith. But as there is no mention of the church of Rome in this promiſe, nor any where elſe in ſcripture upon the like occaſion, whereby we might be directed to underſtand this promiſe to be made to that church; ſo to any unprejudiced perſon the plain and obvious ſenſe of this promiſe can be no other than this, that our Saviour having commiſſioned the Apoſtles to go and preach the Chriſtian religion in the world, he promiſes to aſſiſt them in this work, and thoſe that ſhould ſucceed them in it, *to the end of the world.* But how any man can conſtrue this promiſe, ſo as to make it ſignify the perpetual infallibility of the Roman church, I cannot for my life deviſe; and yet this is one of the main texts upon which they build that old and tottering fabrick of their infallibility.

Here is a general promiſe of aſſiſtance to the Paſtors and Governors of the church, in all ages, *to the end of the world*; but that this aſſiſtance ſhall always be to the degree of infallibility, (as it was to the Apoſtles) can neither be concluded from the letter of this promiſe, nor from the reaſon of it; much leſs can it be from hence concluded, that the aſſiſtance here promiſed, if it were to the degree of infallibility, is to be limited and confined to the ſupreme Paſtor and Governor of the Roman church.

That the aſſiſtance here promiſed ſhall always be to the degree of infallibility, can by no means be concluded from the letter of this promiſe. Indeed there is no pretence or colour for it; he muſt have a very peculiar ſagacity, that can find out in theſe words, *I am with you always*, a promiſe of infallible aſſiſtance. Is not the promiſe which God made to Joſhua, and which the Apoſtle to the Hebrews applies to all Chriſtians, and to all good men in all ages, *I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee*, the very ſame in ſenſe with this, *I will be with you always?* And yet ſurely no man did ever imagine, that

by virtue of this promise, every Christian, and every good man is infallible.

But neither can it be inferred from the reason of this promise, that this assistance shall always be to the degree of infallibility. It was so indeed to the Apostles; the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were bestowed upon them for the more speedy and effectual planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, were a divine testimony and confirmation to the doctrine which they delivered; and having this divine testimony given to them, we are certain that they were secured from error in the delivery of that doctrine. So that the Apostles had no other infallibility, but what depended upon, and was evidenced by the miraculous gifts wherewith they were endued; and therefore without the like gifts, none can with reason pretend to the like infallibility: For infallibility signifies an extraordinary assistance of God's Spirit, whereby those who are thus assisted are secured from error. This every confident man may, if he pleaseth, pretend to; but no man is to be believed to have it, but he who can give such evidence of it, as is fit to satisfy reasonable men, that he hath it. Now the only sufficient evidence of such an extraordinary divine assistance is the power of miracles. This indeed is the great external testimony of a teacher come from God, *if he do such works as none can do, except God be with him*; and this evidence the Prophets of old, and our Saviour and his Apostles, always gave of their infallibility. And if the Pope and general councils can give the testimony of such miracles for their infallibility, as Moses, and our Saviour and his Apostles did work, we are ready to acknowledge it. Such a testimony as this would give the world a thousand times more satisfaction concerning their infallibility, than all the subtle arguments of Bellarmine, and all their writers. But if they cannot, they may dispute about it to the end of the world; and every man that hath but the same confidence, may pretend to it with as much reason as they do.

But

But to proceed in my argument; here is a plain reaſon why this extraordinary aſſiſtance ſhould be granted to the Apoſtles at firſt; and another reaſon as plain, why it ſhould not be continued afterwards. It was reaſonable, and in ſome degree neceſſary, that the Apoſtles ſhould be thus aſſiſted at the firſt publication of the goſpel, namely, to give ſatisfaction to the world, that they were faithful and true witneſſes of the doctrine and miracles of Chriſt. But ſince this doctrine and theſe miracles are recorded to poſterity by thoſe very perſons that were thus aſſiſted, here is as plain a reaſon, why after the goſpel was planted and eſtabliſhed in the world, this infallibility ſhould ceaſe. So long as we have an infallible foundation of faith, namely, the divine revelation conſigned in writing, and tranſmitted down to us by teſtimony of undoubted credit, what need is there now of a fixed and ſtanding infallibility in the church? But having handled this argument more at large elſewhere, I ſhall inſiſt no further upon it here.

I have now done with the three things I propounded to diſcourſe upon from this text. You have heard what authority our Saviour had given him; what commiſſion he gave to his diſciples; and what aſſiſtance he hath promiſed to the paſtors and governors of his church to the end of the world: namely, ſuch an aſſiſtance as is ſuitable to the exigencies of the church, in the ſeveral ages and ſtates of Chriſtianity; which aſſiſtance was at firſt very extraordinary and miraculous. God was pleaſed to give witneſs to the firſt teachers and publiſhers of the goſpel, *with ſigns and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt*; and this at firſt was in a very great degree neceſſary, it not being otherwiſe imaginable, how Chriſtianity could have born up againſt all that force and violent oppoſition which was raiſed againſt it: But this extraordinary aſſiſtance was but a temporary and tranſient diſpenſation. God did, as it were, paſs by *in the ſtrong and mighty wind, in the earthquake, and in the fire*; *but he was in the ſtill voice*; that is, he deſigned to ſettle and conti-

nue that diſpenſation, in that more calm and ſecret way of aſſiſtance, which offers leſs violence to the nature of man, but which was intended for the conſtant and permanent diſpenſation. So that we have no reaſon to think, that God hath now forſaken his church, though he be not with it in ſo ſenſible and extraordinary a manner.

But then if any particular church deſire and expect this bleſſed preſence and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, we muſt remember, that there is a condition to be performed on our parts. For how abſolute ſoever this promiſe may be, in reſpect of the church univerſal; it is certainly conditional to any particular church, as ſad experience in many inſtances hath ſhewn. God hath long ſince left the church of Jeruſalem, where the goſpel was firſt publiſhed; he hath left the church of Antioch, where the believers of the goſpel were firſt called Chriſtians; he hath left the famous churches of Aſia, to that degree of deſolation, that the ruins and places of ſome of them are hardly at this day certainly known. And this may alſo be the fate of any particular church, not excepting Rome herſelf, for all her pride and confidence to the contrary. *Behold therefore the goodneſs and ſeverity of God: towards them that fell, ſeverity; but towards us goodneſs, if we continue in his goodneſs; otherwiſe we alſo ſhall be cut off.*

This, as I obſerved before, is ſpoken particularly to the Roman church; the Apoſtle ſuppoſeth that the church of Rome herſelf may be guilty of apoſtacy from the faith, and cut off by unbelief, and indeed ſeems to foretel it; which how it conſiſts with their confident pretence to infallibility, let them look to it.

And let all particular churches look to themſelves that they do not forfeit this promiſe of divine aſſiſtance. For Chriſt hath not ſo tied himſelf to any particular church, but that if they forſake him, he may leave them, and *remove his candleſtick from them.* There have been many ſad inſtances of this, ſince the firſt planting of Chriſtianity; and we have no ſmall reaſon to apprehend that it may come to be our own

own caſe; for certainly we have many of thoſe marks of ruin among us, which did foretel the deſtruction of the Jewiſh church and nation; horrible profaneneſs and contempt of religion, diviſion and animoſities to the higheſt degree, and an univerſal diſſoluteneſs and corruption of manners. And why ſhould we, who do the ſame things, think ourſelves exempted from the ſame fate? What can we expect, but that God ſhould deal with us, as he did with them, *take away the kingdom of God from us, and give it to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it?*

The condition of this great promiſe here in the text, to the Paſtors and Governors of the Chriſtian church, is the faithful execution of their commiſſion; if they do ſincerely endeavour to gain men to the belief and practice of Chriſtianity, Chriſt hath promiſed to be with them. The performance of this condition doth primarily concern the chief governors of the church, and next to them the miniſters of the goſpel in general, that they ſhould be diligent and faithful in their reſpective ſtations, *teaching men to obſerve all things, whatſoever Chriſt hath commanded.* And if we would make this our great work, to inſtruct our reſpective charges in the neceſſary doctrines of faith, and the indiſpenſable duties of a good life, we ſhould have far leſs trouble with them about other matters. And that we may do this work effectually, we muſt be ſerious in our inſtructions, and exemplary in our lives. Serious in our inſtructions; this certainly the Apoſtle requires in the higheſt degree, when he chargeth miniſters, *ſo to ſpeak, as the oracles of God*: to which nothing can be more contrary, than to trifle with the word of God, and to ſpeak of the weightieſt matters in the world, the great and everlaſting concernments of the ſouls of men, in ſo ſlight and indecent a manner, as is not only beneath the gravity of the pulpit, but even of a well-regulated ſtage. Can any thing be more unſuitable, than to hear a miniſter of God from this ſolemn place, to break jeſts upon ſin, and to quibble upon the vices of the age? This is to ſhoot without a bullet, as if we had no mind to do execution, but only

only to make men ſmile at the mention of their faults; this is ſo nauſeous a folly, and of ſo pernicious conſequence to religion, that hardly any thing too ſevere can be ſaid of it.

And then if we would have our inſtructions effectual, we muſt be exemplary in our lives. Ariſtotle tells, that the manners of the ſpeaker have κυριωτάτην πίστιν, the moſt ſovereign power of perſuaſion. And therefore Cato puts it into the definition of an orator, that he is *vir bonus, dicendi peritus*, "a good man, and "an eloquent ſpeaker." This is true as to all kinds of perſuaſion; the good opinion which men have of the ſpeaker, gives great weight to his words, and does ſtrangely diſpoſe the minds of men to entertain his counſels. But the reputation of goodneſs is more eſpecially neceſſary and uſeful to thoſe whoſe proper work it is to perſuade men to be good; and therefore the Apoſtle, when he had charged Titus to put men in mind of their duty, he immediately adds, *in all things ſhewing thyſelf a pattern of good works*. None ſo fit to teach others their duty, and none ſo likely to gain men to it, as thoſe who practiſe it themſelves; becauſe hereby we convince men that we are in earneſt, when they ſee that we perſuade them to nothing, but what we chooſe to do ourſelves. This is the way to *ſtop the mouths of men*, and to confute their malice, by an exemplary piety and virtue. So St. Peter tells us, 1 Pet. ii. 15. *For ſo is the will of God, that by well-doing ye put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men.*

SER-

SERMON CXXV.

The difficulties of a Chriſtian life conſidered.

LUKE xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.

THere are two great miſtakes about the nature of religion, equally falſe, and equally pernicious to the ſouls of men: and the Devil, whoſe great deſign it is to keep men off from religion by any means, makes uſe of both theſe miſtakes, to ſerve his own purpoſe and deſign upon the ſeveral tempers of men. Thoſe who are melancholy and ſerious, he diſheartens and diſcourageth from attempting it, by the extreme trouble and difficulty of it, repreſenting it in ſo horrid and frightful a ſhape, incumbered with ſuch difficulties, and attended with ſuch troubles and ſufferings, as are inſuperable, and intolerable to human nature; whereby he perſuades men, that they had better never attempt it, ſince they may deſpair to go through with it.

On the other hand, thoſe who are ſanguine and full of hopes, he poſſeſſes with a quite contrary apprehenſion; that the buſineſs of religion is ſo ſhort and eaſy a work, that it may be done at any time, and if need be, at the laſt moment of our lives, though it is not ſo well to put it upon the laſt hazard; and by this means a great part of mankind are lulled in ſecurity, and adjourn the buſineſs of religion from time to time; and becauſe it is ſo eaſy, and ſo much in their power, they ſatisfy themſelves with an indeterminate reſolution to ſet about that buſineſs ſome time

time or other before they dy, and ſo to repent and make their peace with God once for all.

Theſe pretences contradict one another, and therefore cannot be both true; but they may both be falſe, as indeed they are, and truth lies between them; religion being neither ſo ſlight and eaſy a work as ſome would have it, nor ſo extremely difficult and intolerable, as others would repreſent it. To confute the falſe apprehenſions which ſome have of the eaſineſs of it, our Saviour tells us, there muſt be ſome ſtriving; and to ſatisfy us, that the difficulties of religion are not ſo great and inſuperable, as ſome would make them, our Saviour tells us, that thoſe who ſtrive ſhall ſucceed and enter in; but thoſe who only ſeek, that is, do not vigorouſly ſet about the buſineſs of religion, but only make ſome faint attempts to get to heaven, ſhall not be able to enter in. *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, but ſhall not be able.*

The occaſion of which words of our bleſſed Saviour, was a queſtion that was put to him by one of his diſciples, concerning the number of thoſe that ſhould be ſaved, ver. 23. One ſaid unto him, *Lord, are there few that be ſaved?* To which curious queſtion, our Saviour (according to his manner, when ſuch kind of queſtions were put to him) does not give a direct anſwer, becauſe it was neither neceſſary, nor uſeful for his hearers to be reſolved in: it did not concern them to know what number of perſons ſhould be ſaved, but what courſe they ſhould take, that they might be of that number; and therefore, inſtead of ſatisfying their curioſities, he puts them upon their duty; admoniſhing them, inſtead of concerning themſelves what ſhould become of others, to take care of themſelves. *And he ſaid unto them. ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.* He does not ſay, that *but few ſhall be ſaved*; (as ſome have preſumptuouſly ventured to determine) but only few in compariſon of thoſe many *that ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.*

In

In theſe words we may conſider theſe two things:

Firſt, The duty enjoined, *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate.*

Secondly, The reaſon or argument to enforce it, *For many ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.*

Firſt, The duty enjoined, *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate.* Which words being metaphorical, I ſhall ſtrip them of the metaphor, that ſo we may ſee the plain meaning of them. Now by this metaphor, or rather allegory, theſe three things are plainly intended:

1ſt, The courſe of a holy and chriſtian life, in order to the obtaining of eternal happineſs, is here repreſented to us by *a way*, which every man that would come to heaven, muſt walk in. For ſo St. Matth. (who expreſſeth this more fully) makes mention of *a way* as well as *a gate*, by which we muſt enter into it; *ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life.* And this though it be not expreſſed by St. Luke, is neceſſarily underſtood, *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate*, that is, into the way that leads to life.

2dly, The firſt difficulties of a holy and religious courſe of life, are here repreſented to us by a *ſtrait gate.* For the gate at which we enter, and the way in which we walk, can ſignify nothing elſe, but the beginning and progreſs of a holy and religious courſe.

3dly, Our diligence and conſtancy in this courſe, are repreſented by *ſtriving*, a word which hath a great force and emphaſis in it, ἀγωνίζεσθε, a metaphor taken from the earneſt contention which was uſed in the Olympic games, by thoſe who ſtrove for maſtery in running or wreſtling, or any of the other exerciſes which were there uſed.

Secondly, Here is a reaſon added to enforce the exhortation or duty; *for many ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able:* that is, there are a great many that will do ſomething in Chriſtianity, and make ſome faint attempts to get to heaven, who yet ſhall fall ſhort of it, for want of ſuch a firm reſolution and earneſtneſs of endeavour, as is neceſſary to the attaining of it.

Having

Having thus explained the words, I shall take occasion from the first part of them, namely, the duty of exhortation, to handle these three points, very useful for us to consider, and to be well instructed in:

1*st*, The difficulties of a holy and Christian course.

2*dly*, The firm resolution and earnest endeavour that is required on our part for the conquering of these difficulties.

3*dly*, That these difficulties are not so great and insuperable, as to be a just discouragement to our endeavours; if we will strive, we may master them.

First, The difficulties of a holy and Christian course. And these are either from ourselves, or from something without us.

1. From ourselves, from the original corruption and depravation of our nature, and the power of evil habits and customs, contracted by vicious practices. Our natures are vitiated and depraved, inclined to evil, and impotent to good; besides, that being habituated to sin and vice, it is a matter of infinite difficulty to break off a custom, and to turn the course of our life another way. Now because this is the difficulty of our first entrance into religion, it is represented by a *strait gate*, which is hard to get through.

2. There are likewise other difficulties from without; as namely, the opposition and persecution of the world, which was very raging and violent in the first beginnings of Christianity. And this our Saviour represents by the ruggedness and roughness of the way, as St. Matthew expresseth it, chap. vii. 14. *Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life*, Καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς, *confragosa est via*, (so Grotius renders it) the way is craggy, full of afflictions and troubles.

So that these are the two great difficulties in a Christian course, indisposition from within, and opposition from without.

1. Indisposition from within. And this makes religion so much the more difficult, because it checks us at our very first entrance upon our Christian course, and makes us unwilling to set out. The corruption of

of our nature, and thoſe vitious habits, which by a long cuſtom of ſin we have contracted, do ſtrongly incline us to the contrary way, ſo that a man muſt offer great force and violence to himſelf, that will conquer this difficulty. It is one of the hardeſt things in the world to break off a vitious habit, and to get looſe from the tyranny of cuſtom. The Prophet Jeremiah ſpeaks of it as next to a natural impoſſibility, chap. xiii. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his ſpots? Then may ye alſo do good, that are accuſtomed to do evil.* This requires great ſtriving indeed. Nothing ſhows the ſpirit and reſolution of a man more, than to contend with an inveterate habit, for in this caſe a man ſtrives againſt the very bent and inclination of his ſoul; and it is eaſier to ſet a man againſt all the world, than to make him fight with himſelf: and yet this every man muſt do, who from any wicked courſe of life, betakes himſelf ſeriouſly to religion; he muſt as it were lay violent hands upon himſelf, and fight with the man he was before; and this in ſcripture is emphatically expreſt to us, *by crucifying the old man, with the affections and luſts thereof.* A Chriſtian when he firſt enters upon a holy and good courſe of life, is repreſented as two perſons or parties at civil wars one with another, the old, and the new man; ſo that whoever will be a Chriſtian, muſt put off himſelf, and become another man; and it is no eaſy matter for a man to quit himſelf.

2. In our Chriſtian courſe, we muſt likewiſe expect to meet with great oppoſition from without. Bleſſed be God, Chriſtianity hath generally been for many ages free from this difficulty, which attended the firſt profeſſion of it: it was then indeed a very ſteep and craggy way, very rough and thorny, not to be travelled in without ſweat and blood: then the dangers and hazards of that profeſſion were ſuch, as were not to be encountered by a mere moral reſolution, and the natural ſtrength of fleſh and blood; the perſecution that attended it was ſo hot, and the torments which threatened it ſo terrible, that the ſenſual and inconſiderate part of mankind would rather venture hell at

a diſtance, than run themſelves upon ſo preſent and evident a danger.

But ſince theſe ages of perſecution, this difficulty hath been in a great meaſure removed. Not but that the true religion hath ſtill its enemies in the world; but they are not let looſe, as they were in thoſe times; it is ſtill perſecuted and expoſed to the malice and reproach, but not to the rage and fury of unreaſonable men. In the calmeſt times there is hardly any man can be a ſtrict and ſincere Chriſtian, without being liable to hatred and contempt, without denying himſelf many of thoſe worldly advantages which thoſe who make no conſcience of the ſtrict laws of Chriſtianity may make to themſelves; ſo that at all times it requires a good degree of conſtancy and reſolution to perſevere in a holy courſe, and to bear up againſt the oppoſition of the world, and to withſtand its temptations, to be *harmleſs and blameleſs in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe nation*; not to be infected with the eminent and frequent examples of vice, and carried down with the ſtream of a corrupt and degenerate age. So that though our difficulties be not always the ſame, and equal to thoſe which the primitive Chriſtians encountered, yet there is enough to exerciſe our beſt reſolution and care; though the main body of the enemies of Chriſtianity be broken, and *the ſons of Anak be deſtroyed out of the land*; *yet ſome of the old inhabitants are ſtill left, to be thorns in our ſides, and pricks in our eyes*, that true religion may always have ſomething to exerciſe its force and vigour upon. I have done with the firſt point, the difficulties of a Chriſtian courſe. I proceed to the

Second, The earneſt endeavour that is to be uſed on our part, for the conquering of theſe difficulties. And to the buſineſs of religion, if we will ſet upon it in good earneſt, theſe three things are required:

1*ſt*, A mighty reſolution to engage us in a holy and Chriſtian courſe.

2*dly*, Great diligence and induſtry to carry us on in it.

3*dly*,

3*dly*, An invincible conſtancy to carry us through it, and make us perſevere in it to the end.

1*ſt*, A mighty reſolution to engage us in a holy and good courſe. For want of this moſt men miſcarry and ſtumble at the very threſhold, and never get through the *ſtrait gate*, never maſter the difficulties of the firſt entrance. Many are well diſpoſed towards religion, and have fits of good inclination that way, (eſpecially in their young and tender years) but they want firmneſs of reſolution to conquer the difficulties of the firſt entrance upon a religious and virtuous life: like the young man that came to our Saviour, well inclined to do ſome good thing, that he *might inherit eternal life*; but when it came to the point, he gave back; he was divided betwixt Chriſt and the world, and had not reſolution enough *to part with all for him.*

Many men (I doubt not) have frequent thoughts and deliberations about a better courſe of life, and are in a good mind to take up, and break off that lewd and riotous courſe they are in; but they cannot bring themſelves to a fixt purpoſe and reſolution: and yet without this nothing is to be done, *the double minded man is unſtable in all his ways.* There muſt be no indifferency and irreſoluteneſs in our minds, if we will be Chriſtians; we muſt not ſtop at the *gate*, but reſolve to preſs in. We ſee that men can take up peremptory reſolutions in other matters, to be rich and great in the world, and they can be true and ſtedfaſt to theſe reſolutions; and why ſhould not men reſolve to be wiſe and happy, and ſtand to theſe reſolutions, and make them good? God is more ready to aſſiſt and ſtrengthen theſe kind of reſolutions than any other; and I am ſure no man hath ſo much reaſon to reſolve upon any thing, as to live a holy and virtuous life; no other reſolution can do a man that good, and bring him that comfort and happineſs that this will.

2*dly*, The buſineſs of religion, as it requires a mighty reſolution to engage us in a holy and good courſe, ſo likewiſe a great diligence to carry us on in it. When we are got through the *ſtrait gate*, we

muſt account to meet with many difficulties in our way; there are in the courſe of a Chriſtian life many duties to be performed, which require great pains and care; many temptations to be reſiſted, which will keep us continually upon our guard; a great part of the way is up hill, and not to be climbed without labour; and the ſcripture frequently calls upon us, *to work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling*; that is, with great care and induſtry; *to give all diligence to make our calling and election ſure*; to follow holineſs; διώκειν, to purſue it with great earneſtneſs. Nothing in this world that is of value, is to be had on other terms; and we have low thoughts of heaven, if we think any pains too much to get thither.

3*dly*, The buſineſs of religion requires an invincible conſtancy to carry us through it, and to make us perſevere in it to the end. Reſolution may make a good entrance; but it requires great conſtancy and firmneſs of mind to hold out in a good courſe. A good reſolution may be taken up upon a preſent heat, and may cool again; but nothing but a conſtant and ſteady temper of mind will make a man perſevere; and yet without this, no man ſhall ever reach heaven. *He that continueth to the end ſhall be ſaved; but if any man draw back, God's ſoul will have no pleaſure in him.* God puts this caſe by the Prophet, and determines it, Ezek. xviii. 24. *When the righteous man turneth away from his righteouſneſs, ſhall he live? all his righteouſneſs that he hath done, ſhall not be mentioned; in his treſpaſs that he hath treſpaſſed, and in his ſin that he hath ſinned, in them he ſhall dy*; nay, ſo far will his righteouſneſs be from availing him, if he do not perſevere in it, that it will render his condition much worſe, to have gone ſo far towards heaven, and at laſt to turn his back upon it. So St. Peter tells us, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. *For if after they have eſcaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, they are again intangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worſe with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the*

way

way of righteouſneſs, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. I proceed to the

Third point, namely, That the difficulties of a holy and Chriſtian life are not ſo great and inſuperable, as to be a juſt ground of diſcouragement to our endeavours. All that I have ſaid concerning the difficulties of religion, was with no deſign to damp, but rather to quicken our induſtry; for, upon the whole matter, when all things are duly conſidered, it will appear, that *Chriſt's yoke is eaſy, and his burden light; that the commandments of God are not grievous*; no, not this commandment of *ſtriving to enter in at the ſtrait gate*; which I ſhall endeavour to make manifeſt by taking theſe four things into conſideration:

1. The aſſiſtance which the goſpel offers to us. God hath there promiſed *to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him*; and by the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, we may be able to conquer all thoſe difficulties. Indeed if we were left to ourſelves, to the impotency and weakneſs of our own nature, we ſhould never be able to cope with theſe difficulties: every temptation would be too hard for us; every little oppoſition would diſcourage us; but *God is with us, and there is nothing too hard for him.* If the principles of a holy life were only the birth of our own reſolution, they would eaſily be born down; but they are from God, of a heavenly birth and original; and whatſoever is *born of God, overcometh the world.* John i. 12, 13. *As many as received him, to them gave he power* (ἐξουσίαν the privilege) *to become the ſons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the fleſh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

God conſiders the impotency of human nature, in this depraved and degenerate ſtate into which we are ſunk, and therefore he hath not left us to ourſelves; but when he commands us to *work out our own ſalvation,* he tells us for our encouragement, that *he himſelf works in us both to will and to do*; he does not bid us to be ſtrong in our own ſtrength, for he

knows we have no ſtrength of our own, but to be *ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*; and what may not even a weak creature do, that is ſo powerfully aſſiſted? if we will but make uſe of this ſtrength, nothing can be too hard for us. All that God expects from us is, that we ſhould comply with the motions of his Spirit, and be as ſincere in the uſe of our own endeavours, as he is in the offers of his grace and aſſiſtance.

2. Let us conſider, that the greateſt difficulties are at firſt; it is but making one manful onſet, and ſuſtaining the firſt brunt, and the difficulties will abate and grow leſs, and our ſtrength will every day increaſe and grow more. The gate is ſtrait: but when we have once got through it, our feet will be ſet in an open place. After ſome ſtruggling to get through, we ſhall every day find ourſelves at more eaſe and liberty. It will be very hard at firſt, to maſter our vicious inclinations, to change the habit of our minds, and the courſe of our lives, and to act contrary to what we have been long accuſtomed: But this trouble laſts but for a little while; theſe pangs of the new-birth, though they be ſharp, yet they are not uſually of long continuance.

It does indeed require great reſolution and firmneſs of mind, to encounter the firſt difficulties of religion: but if we can but ſtand it out for one brunt, our enemy will give way, and the pleaſure of victory will tempt us on. It is troubleſome to conflict with great difficulties, and men are loth to be brought to it: but when we are engaged, it is one of the greateſt pleaſures in the world to prevail and conquer. Many men are loth to go to war; but after a little ſucceſs, they are as loth to give over; that which was a terror to them at firſt, turns into a pleaſure.

3. Conſider that cuſtom will make any courſe of life tolerable, and moſt things eaſy. Religion, and the practice of a holy life is difficult at firſt; but after we are once habituated to it, the trouble will wear off by degrees, and that which was grievous will become eaſy; nay, by degrees, much more pleaſant than ever the contrary practice was. We ſee the daily experience

perience of this, in the most difficult and laborious employments of this world; a little pains tires a man at first, but when he is once seasoned and inured to labour, idleness becomes more tedious and troublesome to him than the hardest work. Custom will make any thing easy, though it be a little unnatural. Nothing is more unnatural than sin; it is not according to our original nature and frame, but it is the corruption and depravation of it, a second nature superinduced upon us by custom: whereas the practice of holiness and virtue is agreeable to our original and primitive state; and sin and vice are the perverting of nature contrary to our reason, and the design of our beings, and to all obligations of duty and interest: but by returning to God and our duty, we return to our primitive state; we act naturally, and according to the intention of our beings; and when the force of a contrary custom is taken off, and the bias clapt on the other side, we shall run the ways of God's commandments with more delight and satisfaction, than ever we found in the ways of sin.

For sin is a violence upon our natures, and that is always uneasy, yet it is made more tolerable by custom: but religion restores men to their natural state, and then we are at ease and rest. Religion is at first a yoke and burden: but unless we take this upon us, we shall never find rest to our souls.

4*thly*, and *lastly*, Consider the reward that religion propounds, and this must needs sweeten and mitigate all the troubles and difficulties that are occasioned by it. This strait gate through which we must enter, and this craggy way which we are to climb up, leads to life; and he is a lazy man indeed, that will not strive and struggle for life. All that a man can do, he will do for his life, for this miserable life which is so short and uncertain, and born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards; a life not worth the having, nor worth the keeping with any great care and trouble, if it were not in order to a better and happier life. But it is not this life which our Saviour means; that indeed were not worth all this striving for: It is eternal life; a state of perfect and endless happiness;

of

of joys unſpeakable and full of glory. And who would not ſtrive to enter in at that gate, which leads to ſo much felicity? Can a man poſſibly take too much pains, be at too much trouble for a few days, to be happy for ever?

So often as I conſider what incredible induſtry men uſe for the things of this life, and to get a ſmall portion of this world, I am ready to conclude, that either men do not believe the rewards of another world, or that they do not underſtand them; elſe they could not think much to be at the ſame pains for heaven, that they can chearfully beſtow for the obtaining of theſe corruptible things. Can we be ſo unconſcionable, as to think God unreaſonable, when he offers heaven and everlaſting happineſs to us upon as eaſy terms, as any thing in this world is ordinarily to be had? And are not we very fooliſh and unwiſe, to put away eternal life from us, when we may have it upon terms ſo infinitely below the true worth and value of it?

I have now done with the three things which I propounded to ſpeak to from the firſt part of theſe words, which are ſo many arguments to enforce the exhortation here in the text; to ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate, and to give all diligence, by the courſe of a holy and virtuous life, to get to heaven; and we may aſſure ourſelves, that nothing leſs than this will bring us thither. So our Saviour tells us, in the latter part of the text; that *many ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.* I proceed now to the

Second part of the text; the reaſon or argument whereby this exhortation is enforced; *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.* Every ſeeking to enter in will not gain our admiſſion into heaven; therefore there muſt be ſtriving: For men may do many things in religion, and make ſeveral faint attempts to get to heaven, and yet at laſt fall ſhort of it, for want of earneſt contention and endeavour, which is neceſſary to the attaining of it. We muſt make religion our buſineſs, and ſet about it with all our might, and perſevere and hold out in it, if

even

ever we hope to be admitted to heaven; for many ſhall ſeek to enter, that ſhall be ſhut out.

Now what this ſeeking is, which is here oppoſed to ſtriving to enter in at the ſtrait gate, our Saviour declares after the text, ver. 25. *When once the maſter of the houſe is riſen up, and hath ſhut to the door, and ye begin to ſtand without, and to knock at the door, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he ſhall anſwer and ſay unto you, I know you not whence you are; then ſhall ye begin to ſay, we have eaten and drunk in thy preſence, and thou haſt taught in our ſtreets; but he ſhall ſay, I tell you, I know you not whence you are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.* St. Matthew mentions ſome other pretences which they ſhould make; upon which they ſhould lay claim to heaven, Matth. vii. 21, 22, 23. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will ſay to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name? and in thy name have caſt out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity.* After all their ſeeking to enter in, and notwithſtanding all theſe pretences, they ſhall be ſhut out, and be for ever baniſhed from the preſence of God. This ſhall be their doom, which will be much the heavier, becauſe of the diſappointment of their confident expectation and hope. So St. Luke tells us, ver. 28, 29. *There ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth, when ye ſhall ſee Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, and all the Prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourſelves thruſt out. And they ſhall come from the eaſt, and from the weſt, and from the north, and from the ſouth, and ſhall ſit down in the kingdom of God.* To which St. Matth. adds, chap. viii. 12. *But the children of the kingdom ſhall be caſt out into outer darkneſs: there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth.* And then our Saviour concludes, Luke xiii. 30. *And behold there are laſt which ſhall be firſt, and there are firſt which ſhall be laſt.* From all which it appears, with

with what confidence many men, upon theſe falſe pretences, (which our Saviour calls *ſeeking to enter in*) ſhall lay claim to heaven, and how ſtrangely they ſhall be diſappointed of their expectation and hope, when they ſhall find themſelves caſt out of heaven, who they thought had outdone all others in religion, and were the only members of the true church, and the children and heirs of the kingdom; and ſhall ſee others, whom they thought to be out of the pale of the true church, and excluded from all terms of ſalvation, come from all quarters, and find free admiſſion into heaven; and ſhall find themſelves ſo groſsly and widely miſtaken, that thoſe very perſons whom they thought to be laſt, and of all others fartheſt from ſalvation, ſhall be firſt; and they themſelves, whom they took for *the children of the kingdom*, and ſuch as ſhould be admitted into heaven in the firſt place, ſhall be rejected and caſt out.

So that by *ſeeking to enter*, we may underſtand all thoſe things which men may do in religion, upon which they ſhall pretend to lay claim to heaven, nay, and confidently hope to obtain it; and yet ſhall be ſhamefully diſappointed, and fall ſhort of it. Whatever men think, and believe, and do in religion, what privileges ſoever men pretend, what ways and means ſoever men endeavour to appeaſe the Deity, and to recommend themſelves to the divine favour and acceptance, all this is but *ſeeking to enter in*, and is not that *ſtriving* which our Saviour requires. *If men do not do the will of God, but are workers of iniquity*, it will all ſignify nothing to the obtaining of eternal happineſs.

Our Saviour here inſtanceth in mens profeſſion of his religion, *calling him Lord, Lord*; in their perſonal familiarity and converſation with him, by *eating and drinking in his preſence* and company; in their having heard him preach the doctrine of life and ſalvation, *thou haſt taught in our ſtreets*; in their having propheſied and wrought great miracles in his name and by his power, *Have not we propheſied in thy name? and in thy name caſt out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?* Theſe were great

great and glorious things which they boaſted of; and yet nothing of all this will do, if men *do not the will of God*; notwithſtanding all this, he will ſay unto them, *I know you not whence you are; depart from me ye workers of iniquity.*

And by a plain parity of reaſon, whatever elſe men do in religion, what attempts ſoever men may make to get to heaven, upon what privileges or pretences ſoever they may lay claim to eternal life, they will certainly fall ſhort of it, if they *do not the will of God*, but *are workers of iniquity*. My buſineſs therefore at this time ſhall be, to diſcover the ſeveral falſe claims and pretences which men may make to heaven, and yet ſhall never enter into it. And to this purpoſe I ſhall inſtance in ſeveral particulars, by one or more of which men commonly delude themſelves, and are apt to entertain vain and ill-grounded hopes of eternal ſalvation.

1*ſt*, Some truſt to the external profeſſion of the true religion.

2*dly*, Others have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they rely much upon that.

3*dly*, There are others that find themſelves much affected with the word of God, and the doctrines contained in it.

4*thly*, Others are very ſtrict and devout in the external worſhip of God.

5*thly*, Others confide much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone ſalvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which therein they have above others of getting to heaven.

6*thly*, Others think their great zeal for God and his true religion will certainly ſave them.

7*thly*, Others go a great way in the real practice of religion.

8*thly*, Others rely much upon the ſincerity of their repentance and converſion, whereby they are put into a ſtate of grace, and become *the children of God*, and heirs of everlaſting life; and being once truly ſo,

ſo, they can never fall from that ſtate, ſo as finally to miſcarry.

Laſtly, Others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with God to receive them to mercy at the laſt.

I ſhall briefly go over theſe particulars, which are the ſeveral ways whereby men ſeek to enter into heaven, and hope to get thither at laſt; and ſhall ſhew the inſufficiency of them; and that there is ſomething beyond all this neceſſary to be done for the attainment of everlaſting ſalvation.

1ſt, Some truſt to the mere external profeſſion of the true religion, and think it enough to call Chriſt, *Lord, Lord*; to be baptized in his name, and thereby to be admitted members of the Chriſtian church. What the Apoſtle ſays of the profeſſion of the Jewiſh religion, and the outward badge of it, *circumciſion*, may be applied to the profeſſion of Chriſtianity made in baptiſm, Rom. ii. 17, 25, 28, 29 *Behold thou art called a Jew, and reſteſt in the law, and makeſt thy boaſt of God. Circumciſion verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumciſion is made uncircumciſion: For he is not a Jew that is one outwardly, neither is that circumciſion which is outward in the fleſh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumciſion is that of the heart, in the ſpirit, and not in the letter.* The caſe is the ſame of thoſe who make only an outward profeſſion of Chriſtianity. *Baptiſm verily profiteth, if we perform the condition of that covenant which we entered into by baptiſm; but if we do not, our baptiſm is no baptiſm: For he is not a Chriſtian which is one outwardly, nor is that baptiſm which is outward in the fleſh; but he is a Chriſtian which is one inwardly, and baptiſm is of the heart, in the ſpirit, and not in water only.* So St. Peter tells us, 1 Pet. iii. 21. that baptiſm *is not only the waſhing of the body with water, and the putting away of the filth of the fleſh, but the anſwer of a good conſcience towards God.*

The promiſe of eternal life and happineſs is not made to the external profeſſion of religion, without the

the ſincere and real practice of it. *Why call ye me Lord, Lord,* (ſays our Saviour) *and do not the things which I ſay?* The ſcripture hath no where ſaid, *he that is baptized ſhall be ſaved*; but *he that believeth and is baptized, he that repenteth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved.* This deſerves to be ſeriouſly conſidered by a great many Chriſtians, who have nothing to ſhew for their Chriſtianity, but their names; whoſe beſt title to heaven is their baptiſm, an engagement entred into by others in their name, but never confirmed and made good by an act of their own; a thing which was done before they remember, and which hath no other effect upon their hearts and lives, than if it were quite forgotten.

2*dly*, There are others who have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they hope that will ſave them. But if our knowledge in religion, though never ſo clear and great, do not deſcend into our hearts and lives, and govern our actions, all our hopes of heaven are built upon a falſe and ſandy foundation. So our Saviour tells us, Matth. vii. 26. *Every one that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them not, ſhall be likened unto a fooliſh man, which built his houſe upon the ſand.* And John xiii. 17. *If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

There is not a greater cheat in religion, nothing wherein men do more groſsly impoſe upon themſelves, than in this matter; as if the knowledge of religion, without the practice of it, would bring men to heaven. How diligent are many in reading and hearing the word of God, who yet take no care to practiſe it in their lives! Like thoſe in the Prophet, Ezek. xxxiii. 31. of whom God complains, *They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they ſit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them.* None do ſo fooliſhly, and yet ſo deſervedly miſs of happineſs, as thoſe who are very careful to learn the way to heaven, and when they have done, will take no pains at all to get thither.

3*dly*, There are others who find themſelves much affected with the word of God, and the preaching of

it; and this they take for a very good ſign, that it hath its due effect upon them. And this happens very frequently, that the word of God makes conſiderable impreſſions upon men for the preſent, and they are greatly affected with it, and troubled for their ſins, and afraid of the judgments of God, and the terrible vengeance of another world; and upon this they take up ſome reſolutions of a better courſe, which after a little while vaniſh and come to nothing. This was the temper of the people of Iſrael, they delighted to hear the Prophet ſpeak to them in the name of God, Ezek. xxxiii. 32. *And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely ſong of one that hath a pleaſant voice, and can play well on an inſtrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.* Mark vi. 20. it is ſaid that Herod had a great reverence for John the Baptiſt, *that he obſerved him, and heard him gladly*; but yet for all that, he continued the ſame cruel and bad man that he was before. And in the parable of the ſower, Matth. xiii. 20. there are one ſort of hearers mentioned, who, *when they heard the word, received it with joy*; *but having no root in themſelves, they endured but for a while, and when tribulation or perſecution ariſeth, becauſe of the word, preſently they are offended.* There are many men who have ſudden motions in religion, and are mightily affected for the preſent; but it muſt be a rooted and fixt principle, that will endure and hold out againſt great difficulties and oppoſition. Acts xxiv. 25. it is ſaid, that when St. Paul *reaſoned of righteouſneſs, and temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled:* And nothing is more frequent, than for men to be mightily ſtartled at the preaching of the word, when their judgments are convinced and born down, and their conſciences touched to the quick: a lively repreſentation of the evil of ſin, and the infinite danger of a ſinful courſe, may ſtir up the paſſions of grief and fear, and dart ſuch ſtings into the conſciences of men, as may make them extremely reſtleſs and unquiet, and work ſome good thoughts and inclinations in them towards a better courſe; and yet like metals, when the heat is over,

over, they may be the harder for having been melted down.

4*thly*, Others ſhew great ſtrictneſs and devotion in the worſhip of God, and this they hope will be accepted, and cannot fail to bring them to heaven: and yet ſome of the worſt of men have been very eminent for this. The Phariſees were the moſt exact people in the world in matter of external ceremony and devotion: and yet for all this, our Saviour plainly tells them, that *they were farther from the kingdom of God*, than thoſe who ſeemed to be fartheſt, *than publicans and harlots*; and that becauſe they were ſo very bad, under ſo great a pretence of devotion, *therefore they ſhould receive the greater damnation.*

Not but that external devotion is a neceſſary expreſſion of religion, and highly acceptable to God, when it proceeds from a pious and devout mind, and when men are really ſuch in their hearts and lives as their external devotion repreſents them to be: But when the outward garb of religion is only made a cloak for ſin and wickedneſs; when there is nothing within to anſwer all the ſhew that we ſee without, nothing is more odious and abominable to God. Theſe are mere engines and puppets in religion: all the motions we ſee without proceed from an artificial contrivance, and not from any inward principle of life; and as no creature is more ridiculous than an ape, becauſe the beaſt makes ſome pretence to human ſhape, ſo nothing is more fulſome than this hypocritical devotion, becauſe it looks like religion, but is the fartheſt from it of any thing in the world.

5*thly*, Others confide very much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone ſalvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which they have thereby above others, of getting to heaven. Thus the Jews confined ſalvation to themſelves, and looked upon all the reſt of the world as excluded from it. And not only ſo, but they believed that by one means or other every Iſraelite ſhould be ſaved. So that they were the

Jewiſh catholick church, out of which there was no hope of ſalvation for any.

The ſame pretence is made by ſome Chriſtians at this day, who engroſs ſalvation to themſelves, and will allow none to go to heaven out of the communion of their church; and have ſo ordered the matter, that hardly any that are in it can miſcarry. They are members of an infallible church, which cannot poſſibly err in matters of faith: *they have* not only *eat and drunk in Chriſt's preſence*, but have eat and drunk his very corporal preſence, the natural ſubſtance of his fleſh and blood; they have not only our bleſſed Saviour, but innumerable other interceſſors in heaven; they have not only their own merits to plead for them, but in caſe they be defective, they may have the merits of others aſſigned and made over to them out of the infinite ſtock and treaſure of the church, upon which they may challenge eternal life, as of right and due belonging to them; and by a due courſe of confeſſion and abſolution, may quit ſcores with God for all their ſins from time to time. Or if they have neglected all this, they may, after the moſt flagitious courſe of life, upon attrition (that is, upon ſome trouble for ſin, out of fear of hell and damnation) joined with confeſſion and abſolution, get to heaven at laſt; provided the Prieſt mean honeſtly, and do not, for want of intention, deprive them of the ſaving benefit and effect of this ſacrament.

But is it poſſible men can be deluded at this rate; as to think that confidence of their own good condition, and want of charity to others, will carry them to heaven? That any church hath the privilege to ſave impenitent ſinners? And they are really impenitent, who do not exerciſe ſuch a repentance as the goſpel plainly requires: and if men dy in this ſtate, whatever church they are of, the great Judge of the world hath told us, that *he will not know them*, but will bid them *to depart from him, becauſe they have been workers of iniquity*.

6*thly*, Others think that their zeal for God and his true religion will certainly ſave them. But zeal, if it be not *according to knowledge*, if it be miſtaken in its object,

object; or be irregular and excessive in the degree, is so far from being a virtue, that it may be a great sin and fault; and though it be for the truth, yet if it be destitute of charity, and separated from the virtues of a good life, it will not avail us. So St. Paul tells us, that *though a man shall give his body to be burnt; yet if he have not charity, it is nothing.*

7thly, Others go a great way in the real practice of religion, and this sure will do the business. And it is very true, and certain in experience, that religion may have a considerable awe and influence upon mens hearts and lives, and yet they may fall short of happiness. Men may in many considerable instances perform their duty to God and man; and yet the retaining of one lust, the practice of any one known sin, may hinder them from *entring in at the strait gate.* Herod did not only *hear John gladly*, but *did many things* in obedience to his doctrine; and yet he was a very bad man. The *Pharisee thanked God* (and it may be truly) *that he was not like other men, an extortioner, or unjust, or an adulterer*; and yet the penitent *Publican* was *justified before him.* The young man who came to our Saviour to know what he should do to enter into life, and of whom our Saviour testifies, that he was *not far from the kingdom of God*, and that he *wanted but one thing*; yet for want of that he miscarried. And St. James assures us, that *if a man keep the whole law, and yet fail in one point, he is guilty of all.* If we be *workers of iniquity* in any one kind, Christ will disown us, and bid us *depart from him.*

8thly, Others rely upon the sincerity of their repentance and conversion, whereby they are put into a state of grace, from whence they can never finally fall. They did once very heartily repent of their wicked lives, and did change their course, and were really reformed, and continued a great while in that good course. And all this may be certainly true, but it is as certain that they are relapsed into their former evil course: and if so, the Prophet hath told us their doom, that *if the righteous man forsake his righteousness, his righteousness shall not be remembered*; but in

the ſin that he hath ſinned, in that ſhall he dy. So that a *righteous man* may *turn from his righteouſneſs, and commit iniquity, and dy in it.* For the Prophet doth not here (as ſome vainly pretend) put a caſe, which is impoſſible in fact ſhould happen, unleſs they will ſay, that the other caſe which he puts together with it, of *the wicked man's turning away from his wickedneſs, and doing that with is lawful and right,* is likewiſe impoſſible; which God forbid. And that men may fall from a ſtate of grace, is no matter of diſcouragement to good men; but a good caution againſt ſecurity, and an argument to greater care and watchfulneſs; according to that of the Apoſtle, *Let him that ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall*; which admonition were ſurely to little purpoſe, if it were impoſſible for them that ſtand to fall.

Laſtly, Others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with God to receive them to mercy at laſt. This indeed is only to *ſeek,* and not to *ſtrive to enter in*; and theſe perhaps are they whom our Saviour repreſents as *ſtanding without,* and *knocking at the door, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open unto us*; or, as St. Matthew expreſſes it, *Many ſhall ſay to me in that day, Lord, Lord,* which is moſt probably meant of the day of judgment, when their caſe is brought to the laſt extremity; and next to that is the day of death, when men are entring into a ſtate of endleſs happineſs or miſery. And no wonder, if the ſinner would then be glad, when he can no longer continue in this world, to be admitted into happineſs in the next: but the door is then ſhut to moſt ſinners, and it is a miracle of God's grace and mercy, if any repentance that men can then exerciſe, (which at the beſt muſt needs be very confuſed and imperfect) will then be accepted; if any importunity, which men can then uſe, will be available. For with what face can we expect, that after all the evil actions of a long life, God ſhould be mollified towards us by a few good words, and accept of a forced and conſtrained repentance for all our wilful and deliberate crimes, and that he ſhould forgive us all our ſins upon

a little importunity, when we can ſin no longer, and would repent no ſooner?

Let us then, by all that hath been ſaid, be effectually perſuaded to mind the buſineſs of religion in good earneſt, and, with all our might, eſpecially the practice of it in the exerciſe of all the graces and virtues of a good life. Let us heartily repent of all the ſins of our paſt life, and reſolve upon a better courſe for the future; and let us not delay and put off this neceſſary work to the moſt unfit and improper time of old age, and ſickneſs, and death: but let us ſet about it preſently, and enter upon a good courſe, and make all the ſpeed and progreſs in it we can.

And let us remember, that whatever we do in religion will not bring us to heaven, if we do not *do the will of our Father which is in heaven*; if we do not give up ourſelves to a conſtant and univerſal obedience to his laws. This is *to ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate*: And though we *ſtrive to enter in* a thouſand other ways, *we ſhall not be able*; and after all our confidence and conceit of ourſelves, and our own righteouſneſs, and ſecurity of our ſalvation from the privileges of any church, it will be a ſtrange damp and diſappointment to us, to ſee the ſincere Chriſtians, who have done the will of God, and lived in obedience to his laws, to come from all quarters and churches in the world, and *ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God*, when we, who thought ourſelves *the children of the kingdom, ſhall be caſt out*, becauſe we have been *workers of iniquity*. I will conclude all with thoſe plain words of the Apoſtle, Rom. ii. 7, 8, 9. *To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory and honour, and immortality; eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil; in the day when God ſhall judge the ſecrets of men by Jeſus Chriſt according to the goſpel.*

SER-

SERMON CXXVI.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day: And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of ſores.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

I Intend, by God's aſſiſtance, to go over this parable, than which I think there is none in the whole goſpel, which is more apt to affect men, or which is more artificially contrived, and in the circumſtances whereof a greater *decorum* is obſerved.

It is a great queſtion among interpreters, whether this narration concerning the rich man and Lazarus be a parable, or a hiſtory, or a mixture of both. That it is not a hiſtory, the reſemblance between it and others of our Saviour's parables, will eaſily convince any man that is not contentious; beſides that, in ſome ancient copies, it is uſhered in with this preface, *And he ſpake a parable to his diſciples: A certain rich man*, &c.

But yet as ſome of the ancients have not improbably conjectured, it ſeems to be ſuch a kind of parable, as had ſomething of a real foundation; as namely, that there was ſuch a poor man as Lazarus is here deſcribed, and of that name among the Jews: For in a mere parable it is altogether unuſual to name perſons, nor is this done in any other of our Saviour's parables.

But

But whether this be ſo or not, is not worth the diſputing, becauſe it alters not the caſe as to our Saviour's purpoſe, and the inſtructions which we may learn from it.

In the handling of this parable, I ſhall explain it as I go along, and draw two ſorts of inſtructions or obſervations from it.

The firſt ſort of obſervations ſhall be from the circumſtances which ſerve for the *decorum* of the parable: And theſe I will not warrant to be all intended by our Saviour; but only to be true in themſelves, and uſeful, and to have a probable riſe from ſome circumſtances of the parable; and therefore I ſhall ſpeak but very briefly to them.

The ſecond ſort of obſervations ſhall be ſuch as are grounded upon the main ſcope and intent of the parable; and theſe I ſhall inſiſt more largely upon. I begin,

Firſt, With thoſe obſervations and inſtructions which I ſhall gather up from the circumſtances which ſerve for the *decorum* of the parable; and I ſhall take them in order as they lie in the parable.

Ver. 19. *There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day.* Some think that our Saviour in this deſcription reflected upon Herod, becauſe he deſcribes this rich man to be *cloathed in purple*. But this conjecture is without reaſon; for beſides that it was not our Saviour's cuſtom in his preaching, to give ſecret girds to the Magiſtrate; it is certain that it was long after our Saviour's time, that purple was appropriated to Kings: It was then, and a great while after, the wear of rich and powerful men, and of the favourites and great men of the court, who are frequently in ancient hiſtories called the *purpurati*, thoſe that wore purple.

That which I obſerve from hence, is, that the rich man is not here cenſured for enjoying what he had, for wearing rich apparel, and keeping a great table. This of itſelf, if it be according to a man's eſtate and quality, and without intemperance, is ſo far from being a fault, that it is a commendable virtue. But

here

here was his fault, that he made all to ſerve his own ſenſuality and luxury, without any conſideration of the wants and neceſſities of others: Whereas one of the great uſes of the plentiful tables of rich men, is from the ſuperfluity of them to feed the poor and the hungry.

Ver. 20. *And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus*, as if our Saviour had ſaid, for inſtance, poor Lazarus, whom ye all knew. And here I cannot but take notice of the *decorum* which our Saviour uſes. He would not name any rich man, becauſe that was invidious, and apt to provoke. He endeavours to make all men ſenſible of their duty; but he would provoke none of them by any peeviſh reflexion; for nothing is more improper than to provoke thoſe whom we intend to perſuade. While a man's reaſon is calm and undiſturbed, it is capable of truth fairly propounded; but if we once ſtir up mens paſſions, it is like muddying of the waters, they can diſcern nothing clearly afterwards. But to proceed in the parable:

There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at the rich man's gate, full of ſores, and was deſirous to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table; moreover the dogs came and licked his ſores. Here are three great aggravations of the rich man's uncharitableneſs:

1*ſt*, That here was an object preſented itſelf to him.

2*dly*, Such an object as would move any one's pity; a man reduced to extreme miſery and neceſſity.

3*dly*, A little relief would have contented him.

1*ſt*, Here was an object preſented itſelf to him, Lazarus laid at a rich man's gate; ſo that as often as he went out of his own houſe and came in, he could not but take notice of him. Good men that are charitably diſpoſed, will enquire out objects for their charity, and not always ſtay till they thruſt themſelves upon them: But he is a very bad man, who, when an object of great pity and charity is preſented, is ſo far from relenting towards him, that he ſtops his ear to his cry, and turns away his face from him.

He

He is an uncharitable man, who being rich, and hearing of the miseries of others, does not take them into consideration: But what we see with our eyes is much more apt to affect us. So that this was an argument of a very cruel dispostion in the rich man, that having so many occasions of seeing Lazarus, he should never be moved to commiserate him.

2*dly*, Here was such an object presented to him, as would move any one's pity, a man reduced to extreme misery and necessity. Here was no common object of charity, a man, not only in extreme want, but in great pain and anguish, and so helpless, that he was unable to keep off the dogs from being troublesome to him: and yet this did not move him.

3*dly*, A very little relief would have contented this poor man, and have been a great kindness to him; that which the rich man might have spared without the least prejudice to himself. He would have been glad to have been *fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table*; and yet the parable intimates, that the rich man was so hard-hearted as not to afford him these.

Ver. 22. *And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom.* Here was a great and sudden change! He who, when he was alive, was neglected by men, and contumeliously exposed like a dead carcase to the dogs, when he dies, is attended on by the angels, and by them safely conveyed into a state of unspeakable happiness. He who lay at the rich man's gate, and could find no entrance there, is admitted into heaven. *The beggar died, and was carried into Abraham's bosom.*

It is very observable, that our Saviour in this parable represents men as passing immediately out of this life into a state of happiness or torment. And as in no other place of scripture, so neither in this, where it had been so proper, does our Saviour give the least intimation of the state of purgatory, which the church of Rome hath devised, and makes so much profit and advantage of; which because it is

so

ſo viſible and apparent, we may without uncharitableneſs ſuppoſe to be the reaſon why they keep ſuch a ſtir about it.

And was carried by the Angels into Abraham's boſom. It was an ancient tradition among the Jews, that the Angels did attend good men at their death, and carry their ſouls into paradiſe, which is here called *Abraham's boſom.* And this was a proper place for Lazarus, who had been neglected by the rich man, to be conveyed into *Abraham's boſom,* who was of a quite contrary temper, and loved to entertain and relieve ſtrangers.

And paradiſe is fitly called *Abraham's boſom,* becauſe the Jews had ſo great a veneration for Abraham, and that deſervedly, for his eminent faith and obedience, that they gave him the firſt place among the bleſſed. Hence is the expreſſion, Mat. viii. 11. of *ſitting down with Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.* Now this expreſſion of *being in Abraham's boſom,* is an alluſion to the cuſtom of feaſts among the Jews, where the moſt eſteemed and beloved gueſt ſat next him that was chief at the feaſt, and leaned on his boſom. Hence St. John is called the Diſciple whom Jeſus loved, becauſe when he ſat at meat, he leaned on his boſom, John xiii. 23. Hence likewiſe is the expreſſion of our Saviour's being *in the boſom of his Father,* to ſignify his dearneſs to him, John i. 18. *No man hath ſeen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the boſom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

I proceed. *The rich man alſo died, and was buried. The rich man alſo died;* this is very elegant and emphatical, inſinuating to us, what the ſcripture ſo often takes notice of; that riches, for all mens confidence in them, will not deliver from death. This rich man indeed was out of danger of being ſtarved and famiſhed, as poor Lazarus was: But death had other ways to come at him. It is probable enough, that he might be ſurfeited by *faring ſumptuouſly every day. The rich man alſo died.*

And was buried. And here again we may obſerve the ſtrict *decorum* which our Saviour uſes in this parable

rable. It is not ſaid of Lazarus, that *he was buried*, but only that *he died*; it is probable that he was flung out of the way into ſome pit or other: But of the rich man it is ſaid, *he was buried.* And this is all the advantage which a rich man hath by a great eſtate after he is dead, to have a pompous and ſolemn funeral; which yet ſignifies nothing to him after death, becauſe he is inſenſible of it.

Ver. 23. *And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his boſom.* As corporal acts are attributed to God in ſcripture, ſo likewiſe to ſeparated ſouls.

In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments; intimating to us, that this ſenſual and voluptuous man had ſtupidly paſt away his life, without any ſerious thoughts and conſideration; but now at laſt he was awakened, when it was too late, and began to conſider. *In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.*

O the ſtupidity of ſinners! who run on blindly in their courſe, and never open their eyes till they are fallen into the pit; who cannot be brought to conſider, till conſideration will do them no good; till it ſerve to no other purpoſe, but to enrage their conſciences, and to multiply the ſtings of them!

Thus it was with this rich man, *he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his boſom.* Our Saviour repreſents him as ſeeing that which would then moſt probably come to his mind. Feeling his own miſery, he began to conſider the happy condition of the poor man whom he had ſo cruelly neglected. And indeed one great part of the torment of hell conſiſts in thoſe reflexions which men ſhall make upon the happineſs which they have wilfully loſt and neglected, and the ſins whereby they have plunged themſelves into that miſerable ſtate.

Ver. 24. *And he cried, and ſaid, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and ſend Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.* See how the ſcene is changed! now he is fain to beg relief of the beggar, who had ſued to him in vain.

Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue. Here is another very decent circumſtance; the rich man is repreſented as not having the face to beg any great relief from Lazarus, towards whom he had been ſo hard-hearted. *To dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue,* had been a very great favour from Lazarus, to whom the rich man had denied even the *crumbs which fell from his table.*

For I am tormented in this flame. The ſcripture loves to make uſe of ſenſible repreſentations, to ſet forth to us the happineſs and miſery of the next life; partly by way of condeſcenſion to our underſtandings, and partly to work more powerfully upon our affections. For whilſt we are in the body, and immerſed in ſenſe, we are moſt apt to be moved by ſuch deſcriptions of things as are ſenſible; and therefore the torments of wicked men in hell, are uſually in ſcripture deſcribed to us, by one of the quickeſt and ſharpeſt pains that human nature is ordinarily acquainted withal, namely, by the pain of burning; fire being the moſt active thing in nature, and therefore capable of cauſing the ſharpeſt pains.

But we cannot from theſe and the like expreſſions of ſcripture certainly determine that this is the true and proper pain of hell: All that we can infer from theſe deſcriptions is this, that the ſufferings of wicked men in the other world, ſhall be very terrible, and as great, and probably greater than can poſſibly be deſcribed to us, by any thing that we are now acquainted withal: for who knows the power of God's anger, and the utmoſt of what omnipotent juſtice can do to ſinners? For as the glory of heaven, and the joys of God's preſence are now inconceivable; ſo likewiſe are the torments of hell, and the miſeries of the damned. *Eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man,* thoſe dreadful things *which God prepares for them that hate him.* Who can imagine the utmoſt ſignificancy of thoſe phraſes which the ſcripture uſes to ſet forth this to us, of God's being *a conſuming fire,* of being *tormented in flames,* of God's *wrath and jealouſy*

jealouſy ſmoaking againſt ſinners, and all the curſes that are written in his book, falling upon them? Who can conceive the horror of thoſe expreſſions, *of the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched,* of God's *pouring out the vials of his wrath,* of being *delivered over to the tormentor,* of being *thruſt into utter darkneſs,* of being *caſt into the lake of fire and brimſtone?* Theſe forms of ſpeech ſeem to be borrowed from thoſe things which among men are moſt dreadful and affrighting, and to be calculated and accommodated to our capacities, and not ſo much intended to expreſs to us the proper and real torments of hell, as to convey to us in a more ſenſible and affecting manner the ſenſe of what the ſcripture ſays in general, that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Ver. 25. *But Abraham ſaid, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedſt thy good things, and likewiſe Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. Abraham ſaid, Son remember.* It is very obſervable, how our Saviour chuſes to repreſent to us the diſcourſe between Abraham and the rich man; though there was the greateſt difference between them imaginable, the one was in heaven, and the other in hell, yet they treated one another civilly. Abraham is brought in giving the common terms of civility to this wretched wicked man, and calling him *ſon*; *ſon, remember.* It was indeed a very ſevere thing which he ſaid to him; he put him in mind of his former proſperity, and of his fault in his unmerciful uſage of Lazarus; *Remember, ſon, that thou in thy lifetime receivedſt thy good things, and Lazarus,* &c. But yet whilſt he ſpeaks ſuch ſharp things to him, he bates bad language. A man may ſay very ſevere things, where a juſt occaſion requires it; but he muſt uſe no reviling; *rem ipſam dic, mitte malè loqui,* ſay the thing, but uſe no bad language. And this, as one ſays, is the true art of chiding, the proper ſtile wherein we muſt uſe to reprove. If we do it with malice, and anger, and contempt, it is miſbecoming, even though we deſpair of doing good; but if we hope for any good effect, we are like to miſs

of it this way; for as the Apoſtle ſays excellently, *The wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God.*

Some think that Abraham gives the rich man the title of *Son* ironically, and by way of jeer; but without all reaſon. For ſurely there is not ſo much bad nature in heaven, as to ſcoff at thoſe who are in miſery. Beſides that we find our Saviour obſerving this *decorum* of good language in other of his parables; as particularly, in that of the king who invited gueſts to the marriage of his ſon, Matth. xxii. 11. When the king ſaw there the man that came without his wedding garment, though he paſt a very ſevere ſentence upon him, yet he gives him the common terms of civility, *Friend, how cameſt thou hither?*

This ſhould teach us Chriſtians, how we ought to demean ourſelves towards thoſe who are at the greateſt diſtance from us, and how we ought to behave ourſelves towards one another in the greateſt differences of religion. None ſure can be at greater diſtance than Abraham in paradiſe, and the rich man in hell; and yet our Saviour would not repreſent them as at terms of defiance with one another. One might have expected that Abraham ſhould have reviled this poor wretch, and diſdained to have ſpoken to him: But this is not the temper of heaven, nor ought it to be of good men upon earth, even towards the worſt of men.

How does this condemn our rudeneſs and impatience with one another, in our religious differences! we think no terms bad enough to uſe towards one another: and yet one of the moſt famous diſputes that we find mentioned in ſcripture, and that between the moſt oppoſite parties that can be imagined, was managed after another faſhion; I mean that recorded by St. Jude between Michael the Arch-angel, and the Devil, ver. 9. *Yet Michael the Arch-angel, when contending with the Devil, he diſputed about the body of Moſes, durſt not bring a railing accuſation*; he durſt not allow himſelf this, no, not in the heat of diſpute, when perſons are moſt apt to fly out into paſſion, becauſe

cauſe it was indecent; and would have been diſpleaſing to God. This I believe is the true reaſon why it is ſaid, *he durſt not bring a railing accuſation.* And yet I may add another, which is not improper for our conſideration, I am ſure it hath a good moral, the Devil would have been too hard for him at railing, he was better skilled at that weapon, and more expert at that kind of diſpute.

Which conſideration may be a good argument to us againſt reviling any man. If we revile the good, we are unjuſt, becauſe they deſerve it not; if we revile the bad, we are unwiſe, becauſe we ſhall get nothing by it. I could almoſt envy the character which was given of one of the Romans; *Neſcivit quid eſſet male dicere*; "he knew not what it was to give bad "language."

I proceed. *Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedſt thy good things. Thy good things*; thoſe which thou didſt value and eſteem ſo highly, and didſt place thy chief happineſs in, as if there had been no other good to be ſought after. *Thy good things*, and indeed ſo he uſed them, as if he had been the ſole lord and proprietor of them, and they had not been committed to him, as a ſteward, to be diſpenſed for his maſter's uſe, for the cloathing of the naked, and the feeding of the hungry, and the relieving of thoſe in diſtreſs.

Ver. 27, 28. *Then he ſaid, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldſt ſend him to my father's houſe; for I have five brethren; that he may teſtify unto them, leſt they alſo come into this place of torment.* Here the rich man, though in hell, is repreſented as retaining ſome tenderneſs for his relations, as ſolicitous leſt they ſhould be involved in the ſame miſery with himſelf. The laſt piece of that which commonly remains in men, is natural affection, which is not ſo much a virtue, as a natural principle, and is common to many brute beaſts. When a man puts off this, we may give him up for loſt to all manner of goodneſs. To be without natural affection, is the worſt character can be given of a man. Our Saviour repreſents this rich man in hell as not ſo totally degenerate as to be quite deſtitute of this.

I think ſome attribute this motion of the rich man concerning his brethren to another cauſe; as if he had deſired it, not out of kindneſs to them, but out of regard to himſelf; as being afraid that if his brethren, who probably were corrupted by his example, had periſhed by that means, it would have been an aggravation of his torments. But this conjecture is too ſubtile, and without any good ground; for every man carries his burden of guilt with him out of this world, and it is not increaſed by any conſequence of our actions here. For the crime of a bad example is the ſame, whether men follow it or not, becauſe he that gives bad example to others, does what in him lies to draw them into ſin; and if they do not follow it, that is no mitigation of his fault.

I have but one obſervation more, and that is from the mention of his brethren as his neareſt relations; which is a great aggravation of the rich man's uncharitableneſs, becauſe he is repreſented as having no children to take care for, and yet he would not conſider the poor.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, endeavoured to explain this parable, and have made ſuch obſervations from the circumſtances of it, as may be uſeful for our inſtruction: But as I premiſed at firſt, I will not warrant all theſe obſervations to be certainly intended by our Saviour. I know very well that every circumſtance of a parable is not to be preſt too far, the moral accommodation does chiefly belong to the main ſcope of it, and many circumſtances are only brought in to fill up the parable, and to make up a handſomer way for that which is moſt material, and principally intended: But ſo long as the obſervations are true and uſeful, and have a fair colour and occaſion from the circumſtances, it is well enough; to be ſure there is no harm done. I proceed to the ſecond ſort of obſervations, namely, ſuch as are drawn from the main ſcope and intent of the parable, which I promiſed to ſpeak more largely to; and they are ſix, which I ſhall handle in order.

Firſt, I obſerve that uncharitableneſs and unmercifulneſs to the poor, is a great and damning ſin.

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We find no other fault imputed to the rich man but this, that he took no care out of his ſuperfluity and abundance to relieve this poor man that lay at his gate. He is not charged for want of juſtice, but of charity; not for having got a great eſtate by fraud or oppreſſion, but that in the midſt of this abundance he had no conſideration and pity for thoſe that were in want.

I ſhall endeavour to make out this obſervation by the parts of it.

1*ſt*, That unmercifulneſs and uncharitableneſs to the poor is a great ſin.

2*dly*, Such a ſin, as alone and without any other guilt, is ſufficient to ruin a man for ever. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe ſeverally.

1*ſt*, That unmercifulneſs and uncharitableneſs to the poor is a very great ſin. It contains in its very nature two black crimes, inhumanity and impiety.

1. Inhumanity; it is an argument of a cruel and ſavage diſpoſition, not to pity thoſe that are in want and miſery. And he doth not truly pity the miſeries of others, that doth not relieve them when he hath ability and opportunity in his hands. Tenderneſs and compaſſion for the ſufferings of others, is a virtue ſo proper to our nature, that it is therefore called humanity, as if it were eſſential to human nature, and as if without this we did not deſerve the name of men. To ſee men like ourſelves, *bone of our bone, and fleſh of our fleſh*, labour under want and neceſſity, and yet not to be moved to commiſerate them, this is a ſign that we have put off our own nature, otherwiſe we ſhould pity the ſufferings of it in others. For whenever we behold a man like ourſelves groaning under want, and preſt with neceſſity, and do not relent towards him, and are not ready to relieve him, we are hard-hearted to our own nature, and do in ſome ſenſe what the Apoſtle ſays *no man ever did* (that is, none retaining the temper and affections of a man) *hate his own fleſh*.

This the ſcripture ſpeaks of as a moſt barbarous ſort of inhumanity, and calls it murder, 1 John iii. 15. *Whoſo hateth his brother, is a murderer*; and not

not to relieve our brother in want, is to hate him; for this is the inſtance which the Apoſtle gives at the 17th verſe, *Whoſo hath this world's goods, and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him*; whoſo doth not conſider the poor, is a man-ſlayer and a murderer, he is cruel to his own nature, nay, were he ſufficiently ſenſible of the condition of human nature, he is cruel to himſelf.

Seeſt thou a poor man in great miſery and want, there is nothing that hath befallen him but what is common to man, what might have been thy lot and portion as well as his, and what may happen to thee or thine another time. Make it therefore thine own caſe; (for ſo the providence of God may make it one time or other, and thou provokeſt him to make it ſo ſpeedily, by thy unmerciful diſpoſition toward the poor) I ſay, make it thine own caſe; if thou wert in the poor man's condition, and he in thine, conſult thine own bowels, and tell me how thou wouldſt wiſh him to be affected toward thee. Wouldſt thou be willing that he ſhould ſlight and repulſe thee, and ſhut up his bowels of compaſſion from thee? If not, then do not thou deal ſo with him; conſider that it may be thine own caſe, therefore do not thou give the world any bad example in this kind, do not teach men to be unmerciful, leſt they learn of thee, and thou find the ill effects of it, when it comes to be thine own condition. This is the firſt aggravation of this ſin, the inhumanity of it. But,

2. Beſides the inhumanity of this ſin, it is likewiſe a great impiety toward God. Unmercifulneſs to the poor hath this fourfold impiety in it; it is a contempt of God; an uſurpation upon his right; a ſlighting of his providence; and a plain demonſtration that we do not love God, and that all our pretences to religion are hypocritical and inſincere.

1. It is a contempt of God, and a reproaching of him; ſo Solomon tells us, Prov. xiv. 31. *He that oppreſſeth the poor*, (not only he that dealeth unjuſtly with a poor man, but he that is uncharitable towards him, as appears by the oppoſition, *but he that honoureth him, hath mercy on the poor*. Here oppreſ-

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ſion of the poor is oppoſed to want of charity towards him;) *He that oppreſſeth the poor, reproacheth his maker.* How is that? He deſpiſeth God who made him after his own image and likeneſs: For the poor man bears the image of God as well as the rich, ſo that thou canſt not oppreſs or neglect him, without ſome reflexion upon God, whoſe image he bears.

2. The uncharitable man is an uſurper upon God's right. *The earth is the Lord's and the fulneſs thereof,* and *he hath given it to the children of men,* not abſolutely to diſpoſe of as they pleaſe, but in truſt, and with certain reſervations, ſo as to be accountable to him for the diſpoſal of it. In reſpect of other men, we are indeed true proprietors of our eſtates: but in reſpect of God, we are but ſtewards; and he will call us to an account how we have laid them out. So much as we need is ours; but beyond what will ſupport us, and be a convenient proviſion for our family in the rank wherein God hath placed us, all that is given to us, that we may give it to others. And if God hath been liberal to us in the bleſſings of this life, it is on purpoſe to give us an opportunity, and to engage us to be ſo to others that ſtand in need of our charity; and we are falſe to our truſt, if we keep thoſe things to ourſelves, which we receive from God, for this very end that we might diſtribute them to others, according to the proportion of our ability and their neceſſity. This is to hide our Lord's talent in a napkin, and that which thou ſtoreſt up in this caſe is unjuſtly detained by thee; for God intended it ſhould have been for bread for the hungry, and for cloaths for the naked, for the relief and ſupport of thoſe who were ready to periſh.

3. The uncharitable man is impious in ſlighting of God's providence. He does not conſider that riches and poverty are of the Lord, that he can ſoon change our condition, and that it is an eaſy thing with him to make a rich man poor. We do not ſufficiently reverence the providence which rules the world, if when God hath bleſt us with plenty and abundance, we have no pity and regard for thoſe that are in need. God can ſoon turn the wheel, and lay thee as low as the

the poor man whom thou doſt neglect. He can *caſt down the mighty from their ſeat, and exalt the humble and meek; fill the hungry with good things, and ſend the rich empty away.*

God's providence could eaſily have diſpoſed of things otherwiſe, to have ſecured every man from want: but he hath on purpoſe ordered this variety of conditions, high and low, rich and poor, not that ſome men might have an advantage to inſult over and deſpiſe others, but that there might be an opportunity for the exerciſe of ſeveral virtues; that the poor might have an opportunity to exerciſe their dependence upon God, and their patience and ſubmiſſion to his will; and that the rich might ſhew their temperance, and moderation, and charity.

4. Unmercifulneſs to the poor is a plain demonſtration that we do not love God, and that all our other pretences to religion are hypocritical, and inſincere. St. James tells us, that *pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and the widow*, Jam. i. 27. That *the wiſdom which is from above is full of mercy and good fruits*, chap. iii. 17. St. John repreſents this uncharitable diſpoſition as utterly inconſiſtent with the true love of God, 1 John iii. 17. *But whoſo hath this world's good, and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him; how dwelleth the love of God in him?* In vain does ſuch a man pretend to love God; nay, chap. iv. ver. 20. he tells us, that it is impoſſible ſuch a man ſhould love God. *If a man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath ſeen, how can he love God whom he hath not ſeen?* This deſerves to be ſeriouſly conſidered by thoſe who make a great ſhew of devotion, and are at great pains in prayer, and faſting, and reading, and hearing the word of God, and in all other frugal exerciſes of religion, which ſtand them in no money; leſt all their labour be loſt for want of this one neceſſary and eſſential part; leſt, with the young man in the goſpel, after they have kept all other commandments, they be rejected by

Chriſt

Chriſt for lack of this one thing. I have done with the firſt part of the obſervation, that unmerciſulneſs is a very great ſin. I proceed to the

Second, That it is ſuch a ſin, as alone, and without any other guilt, is ſufficient to ruin a man for ever. The parable lays the rich man's condemnation upon this; it was the guilt of this ſin that tormented him when he was in hell. The ſcripture is full of ſevere threatenings againſt this ſin. Prov. xxi. 13. *Whoſo ſtoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he alſo ſhall cry himſelf, but ſhall not be heard.* God will have no regard or pity for the man that regardeth not the poor. That is a terrible text, Jam. ii. 13. *He ſhall have judgment without mercy, that hath ſhewed no mercy.*

Our Saviour hath two parables to repreſent to us the danger of this ſin; this here in the text, and that in Luke xii. concerning the covetous man that enlarged his barns, and was ſtill laying up, but laid nothing out upon the poor: upon which our Saviour makes this obſervation, which is the moral of the parable, ver. 21. *So is he that layeth up treaſure for himſelf, and is not rich towards God*; ſo ſhall he be, ſuch an iſſue of his folly may every one expect, who layeth up treaſure for himſelf, but does not lay up riches with God. How is that? The ſcripture tells us, by works of mercy and charity; this our Saviour calls *laying up for ourſelves treaſures in heaven*, Matth. vi. 20. And, Luke xii. 33. he calls giving of alms, *providing for ourſelves bags that wax not old, a treaſure in heaven that faileth not.*

There is no particular grace and virtue to which the promiſe of eternal life is ſo frequently made in ſcripture as to this of mercy and charity to the poor. Matth. v. 7. *Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall find mercy.* Which promiſe, as it does not exclude a reward in this world, ſo it ſeems principally to reſpect the mercy of God at the great day, Luke xiv. 12, 13, 14. *When thou makeſt a feaſt, invite not the rich, for they will recompenſe thee again: but invite the poor, and the maimed, and the lame, and the blind, for they cannot recompenſe thee; but thou*

thou ſhalt be recompenſed at the reſurrection of the juſt. Luke xvi, 9. *Make therefore to yourſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlaſting habitations.* 1 Tim, vi. 17, 18, 19. *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate, laying up in ſtore for themſelves a good foundation,* as the word θεμέλιος is ſometimes uſed, *a good treaſure againſt the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.*

But the moſt conſiderable text of all other to this purpoſe is in Matth. xxv. where our Saviour gives us a deſcription of the judgment of the great day: And if that be a true and proper repreſentation of the proceſs of that day, then the grand enquiry will be, what works of charity have been done or neglected by us, and accordingly ſentence ſhall be paſt upon us.

The proper reſult from all this diſcourſe is to perſuade men to this neceſſary duty. Our eternal happineſs does not ſo much depend upon the exerciſe of any one ſingle grace or virtue, as this of charity and mercy. Faith and repentance are more general and fundamental graces, and as it were the parents of all the reſt: But of all ſingle virtues the ſcripture lays the greateſt weight upon of this charity; and if we do truly believe the precepts the of goſpel, and the promiſes and threatenings of it, we cannot but have a principal regard to it.

I know how averſe men generally are to this duty, which makes them ſo full of excuſes and objections againſt it.

1. They have children to provide for. This is not the caſe of all, and they whoſe caſe it is, may do well to conſider, that it will not be amiſs to leave a bleſſing, as well as an inheritance to their children.

2. They tell us they intend to do ſomething when they dy. I doubt that very much; but granting their intention to be real, why ſhould men chooſe to ſpoil a good work, and take away the grace and acceptableneſs

neſs of it, by the manner of doing? It ſhews a great backwardneſs to the work, when we defer it as long as we can. He that will not do good till he be forced by the laſt neceſſity, *diu noluit*, "was long "unwilling." It is one of the worſt compliments we can put upon God, to give a thing to him when we can keep it no longer.

3. Others ſay, they may come to want themſelves, and it is prudence to provide againſt that. To this I anſwer,

(1.) I believe that no man ever came the ſooner to want for his charity. David hath an expreſs obſervation to the contrary, Pſal. xxxvii. 25. *I have been young and now am old, yet I have not ſeen the righteous forſaken, nor his ſeed begging bread.* And though he uſes a general word, yet that by the *righteous* here he intended the *merciful man*, is evident from the next words, *he is ever merciful and lendeth.*

And beſides David's obſervation, we have expreſs promiſes of God to ſecure us againſt this fear, Pſal. xli. 1, 2. *Bleſſed is he that conſidereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preſerve him, and keep him alive, and he ſhall be bleſſed upon the earth.* Prov. xxviii. 27. *He that giveth unto the poor ſhall not lack.*

(2.) Thou mayeſt come to want though thou give nothing; thou mayeſt loſe that which thou haſt ſpared in this kind as well as the reſt; thou mayeſt loſe all, and then thou art no better ſecured againſt want, than if thou hadſt been charitable. Beſides that, when thou art brought to poverty, thou wilt want the comfort of having done this duty, and mayeſt juſtly look upon the neglect of this duty as one of the cauſes of thy poverty.

(3.) After all our care to provide for ourſelves, we muſt truſt the providence of God; and a man can in no caſe ſo ſafely *commit himſelf to God as in well-doing.* If the providence of God (as we all believe) be peculiarly concerned to bleſs one man more than another, I dare ſay the charitable man will not have the leaſt portion.

(4.) There is a worſe objection than all theſe made by ſome grave men, who would be glad under pretence of piety to ſlip themſelves out of this duty; and that is this, that it ſavours of Popery to preſs good works with ſo much earneſtneſs upon men; as if we could merit heaven by them; ſo that they dare not be charitable out of a pious fear, as they pretend, leſt hereby they ſhould entertain the doctrine of merit.

But if the truth were known, I doubt covetouſneſs lies at the bottom of this objection: However it is fit it ſhould be anſwered. And,

(1.) I ſay that no man that is not prejudiced either by his education or intereſt, can think that a creature can merit any thing at the hand of God, to whom all that we can poſſibly do, is antecedently due; much leſs that we can merit ſo great a reward as that of eternal happineſs.

(2.) Though we deny the merit of good works, yet we firmly believe the neceſſity of them to eternal life. And that they are neceſſary to eternal life, is as good an argument to perſuade a wiſe man to do them, as if they were meritorious; unleſs a man be ſo vain-glorious as to think heaven not worth the having, unleſs he purchaſe it himſelf at a valuable conſideration.

And now let me earneſtly intreat you, as you love God and your own ſouls, not to neglect this duty; leſt you bring yourſelves to the ſame miſerable ſtate with this rich man, to whom the leaſt charity that could be asked was denied. Our Saviour hath purpoſely left this parable on record, to be a teſtimony and a witneſs to us; leſt we, being guilty of the ſame ſin, *ſhould come into the ſame place of torments.*

And if any ask me according to what proportion of his eſtate he ought to be charitable? I cannot determine that. Only, let no man neglect his duty, becauſe I cannot (and it may be no one elſe can) tell him the exact proportion of his charity to his eſtate. There are ſome duties that are ſtrictly determined, as thoſe of juſtice; but God hath left our charity

charity to be a *free-will offering.* In the proportion of this duty, every one muſt determine himſelf by prudence and the love of God. God hath left this duty undetermined, to try the largeneſs of our hearts towards him; only to encourage us to be *abundant in this grace,* he hath promiſed, that according to the proportion of our charity, ſhall be the degree of our happineſs, 2 Cor. ix. 6. *He that ſoweth plentifully, ſhall reap plentifully.* But let us be ſure to do ſomething in this kind; any part of our eſtate rather than none.

I will conclude with that excellent counſel of the ſon of Syrach, Eccl. iv. *My ſon, defraud not the poor, and make not the needy eye to wait long. Make not a hungry ſoul ſorrowful, neither provoke a man in his diſtreſs; add not more trouble to a heart that is vexed, defer not to give to him that is in need. Reject not the ſupplication of the afflicted, nor turn away thy face from a poor man; turn not thy eye away from the needy, and give him none occaſion to curſe thee: For if he curſe thee in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, his prayers ſhall be heard of him that made him. Let it not grieve thee to bow down thine ear to the poor, and give him a friendly anſwer with meekneſs. Be as as father to the fatherleſs, and inſtead of a husband to their mother; ſo ſhalt thou be as the Son of the Moſt High, and he ſhall love thee more than thy mother doth.*

SERMON CXXVII.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day: And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of ſores.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

I Proceed to our ſecond obſervation, that a man may be poor and miſerable in this world, and yet dear to God. The beggar Lazarus, though he was ſo much ſlighted, and deſpiſed in his lifetime by this great rich man, yet it appeared when he came to dy, that he was not neglected by God, for *he gave his Angels charge concerning him*, to convey him to happineſs; ver. 22. *The beggar died, and was carried into Abraham's boſom.*

But this truth is not only repreſented to us in a parable, but exemplified in the life of our bleſſed Saviour. Never was any man ſo dear to God as he was, for he was *his only begotten Son, his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleaſed*: And yet how poor and mean was his condition in this world! inſomuch that the Jews were offended at him, and could not own one that appeared in ſo much meanneſs, for the true Meſſias. He was born of mean parents, and perſecuted as ſoon as he was born; he was deſtitute of worldly accommodations; *The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had neſts; but the Son of man had not where to lay his head. He was deſpiſed and rejected of men; a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief.*

God

God could have ſent his Son into the world with majeſty and great glory, and have made all the kings of the earth to have bowed before him, and paid homage to him: but the wiſdom of God choſe rather that he ſhould appear in a poor and humble, in a ſuffering and afflicted condition, to confound the pride of the world, who meaſure the love of God by theſe outward things, and think that God hates all thoſe whom he permits to be afflicted.

Now it was not poſſible to give a greater and clearer demonſtration of this truth, that goodneſs and ſuffering may meet together in the ſame perſon, than in the Son of God, *who did no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth; yet it pleaſed the Lord to bruiſe him, and to put him to grief.*

Afflictions in this world are ſo far from being a ſign of God's hatred, that they are an argument of his love and care; *whom the Lord loveth he chaſteneth, and ſcourgeth every ſon whom he receiveth.* Thoſe he deſigns for great things hereafter, he trains up by great hardſhips in this world, and by many tribulations prepares them for a kingdom. This courſe God took more eſpecially in the firſt planting of Chriſtianity; the poor chiefly were thoſe that *received the goſpel. Not many mighty, nor many noble; but the baſe things of the world, and the things that were deſpiſed, did God chooſe. Hearken, my beloved brethren,* ſaith St. James, chap. ii. 5. *Hath not God choſen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promiſed to them that love him?*

Now this conſideration ſhould perſuade to patience under the greateſt ſufferings and afflictions in this world. God may be our Father, and chaſten us ſeverely; nay, this very thing is rather an argument that he is ſo. God may love us, though the world hate us. 'Tis but exerciſing a little patience, and theſe ſtorms will blow over, and we ſhall be removed into a calmer region, where *all tears ſhall be wiped from our eyes; and death and ſorrow ſhall be no more.* This was the portion of the Son of God here; but *it is a faithful ſaying, that if we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him; if we ſuffer with him, we*

ſhall alſo reign with him. Therefore thoſe who ſuffer in this world ought not to be moved, *as though ſome ſtrange thing happened unto them; but they ſhould rather rejoice, in as much as they are partakers of Chriſt's ſufferings, that, when his glory ſhall be revealed, they alſo may be glad with exceeding joy,* 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. I proceed to a

Third obſervation, which is the different eſtate of good and bad men after this life. *Lazarus died, and was carried by the Angels into Abraham's boſom: the rich man died, and went to hell.* This the juſtice of divine providence ſeems to require; ſo that if there had been no revelation of God to this purpoſe, it is a thing very credible to natural reaſon, whether we conſider God or ourſelves. If we conſider God, our reaſon tells us, that he is the holy and righteous Governor of the world, and conſequently, that he loves goodneſs, and hates ſin; and therefore is concerned to countenance the one, and diſcountenance the other, in ſuch a ſolemn and publick manner, as may vindicate his holineſs and juſtice to the world. Now the diſpenſations of his providence are promiſcuous in this world; and therefore it ſeems very reaſonable that there ſhould be a general aſſize, a fair and open trial, when *God will render to every man according to his works.*

And if we conſider ourſelves, this will appear very credible; for this has been the conſtant opinion not only of the common people, but of the wiſeſt perſons, who had only the light of nature to guide them. Nay, if we do but ſearch our own conſciences, we ſhall find an inward and ſecret acknowledgment of this, in that inward peace and ſatisfaction we find in any good action, and in that ſhame, and fear, and horror, that haunts a man after the commiſſion of any, though never ſo ſecret a ſin.

And as reaſon and ſcripture together do aſſure us of a future judgment; ſo likewiſe, that men, when they paſs out of this world, ſhall meet with the proper conſequences and rewards of their actions in the other. And though the happineſs or miſery of men be not ſo compleat as it ſhall be after the publick judgment

ment; yet it is unſpeakably great. Lazarus is repreſented as very happy immediately after his paſſing out of this world; he is ſaid to be *carried into Abraham's boſom:* by which the Jews expreſs the happineſs of the future ſtate. And the rich man is repreſented as in great anguiſh and torment. But what the happineſs of good men, and the miſery of wicked men ſhall be in the other ſtate, we can but now imperfectly and unskilfully deſcribe. Each of theſe I have in another diſcourſe [*Sermon* clxiii. *on Rom.* vi. 21. 22.] ſpoken ſomething to. I proceed to a

Fourth obſervation, the vaſt difference between mens conditions in this world, and the other. The rich man proſpered here, and was afterwards tormented: Lazarus was poor and miſerable in this world, and happy in the other; ver. 25. *Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedſt thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* And it is very agreeable to the wiſdom of God, to make ſuch a difference between mens conditions in this world and the other; and that for theſe two reaſons:

1*ſt*, For the trying of mens virtue.

2*dly*, In order to the recompenſing of it.

1. For the trial of mens virtue. For this end principally God ordains the ſufferings of good men, and permits the beſt of his ſervants many times to be involved in the greateſt calamities, to try their faith in him, and love to him; to improve their virtue, and to prevent thoſe ſins into which the mighty temptations of a perpetual proſperity are apt to draw even the beſt of men; to take off their affections from the love of this vain world, and to engage and fix them there, where they ſhall never repent that they have placed them; to prove their ſincerity towards God, and to exerciſe their patience and ſubmiſſion to his will; to prepare them for the glory of the next life, and to make the happineſs of heaven more welcome to them, when they ſhall come to it.

2*dly*, In order to the recompenſing of men: that they who will take up with the pleaſures and enjoyments of this preſent world, and take no care for their

their future ſtate; that they who will gratify their ſenſes, and neglect their immortal ſouls, may inherit the proper conſequences of their wretched choice. And on the other hand, that they who love God above all things, and had rather endure the greateſt evils, than do the leaſt; that they who look beyond the preſent ſcene of things, and believe the reality and eternity of the other ſtate, and live accordingly, may not be diſappointed in their hopes, and ſerve God and ſuffer for him for nothing. From this conſideration of the difference between the condition of men in this world and the other, we may infer,

1. That no man ſhould meaſure his felicity or unhappineſs by his lot in this world. If thou receiveſt thy good things, art rich and honourable, and haſt as much of the things of this world as thine heart can wiſh, art ſplendidly attired, and *fareſt ſumptuouſly every day*; *art in no trouble like other men, neither art plagued like other folk*; do not upon this bleſs thy ſelf as the happy man. On the other hand, art thou poor and miſerable, deſtitute of all the conveniencies and accommodations of this life? do not repine at thy lot, and murmur at God for having dealt hardly with thee. No man can be pronounced happy or miſerable for what befals him in this life; *no man knows love or hatred by theſe things*: this life is but a ſhort and inconſiderable duration, and it matters not much what entertainment we meet withal, as we are paſſing through this world: The ſtate of eternity is that wherein the happineſs or miſery of men ſhall be determined. He is the happy man who is ſo in that life which ſhall never have an end; and he is miſerable that ſhall be ſo for ever.

2. We ſhould not ſet too great a value upon the bleſſings of this life. We may *receive our good things* here, and *be tormented* hereafter; nay, this very thing will be no inconſiderable part of our torment, none of the leaſt aggravations of our miſery, that we *did receive our good things*. Nothing afflicts a man more, and toucheth him more ſenſibly when he is in miſery, than the remembrance of his former proſpe-

proſperity; had he never been happy, his miſery would be the leſs.

Therefore we ſhould be ſo far from applauding ourſelves in the proſperity of this world, that we ſhould rather be afraid of *receiving our good things* here; leſt God ſhould put us off with theſe things, and this ſhould be all our portion, and leſt our miſery in the next world ſhould be the greater for our having been happy.

The felicities of this world are tranſient, and though our happineſs were never ſo compleat, yet it is going off, and paſſing away; and when it is gone and paſt, if miſery ſucceed it, it had better never have been. *Remember, thou in thy life-time receivedſt thy good things*; theſe things are only for our *life-time*, and how ſhort is that! Did men ſeriouſly conſider this, they would not ſet ſuch a price upon any of the tranſient enjoyments of this life, as for the ſake of them to neglect the great concernments of another world. We are apt to be dazzled with the preſent glittering of worldly glory and proſperity: But if we would look upon theſe things as they will be ſhortly gone from us, how little would they ſignify! The rich man here in the parable, did, no doubt, think himſelf a much happier man than poor Lazarus that lay at his door; and yet after a little while, how glad would he have been to have changed conditions with this poor man! When he was *in torments*, then no doubt he wiſhed that he had ſuffered all the miſery and want in this world, which Lazarus did, provided he might have been *comforted* as he was, and *carried by Angels into Abraham's boſom*. We ſhould value this world, and look upon it, as this rich man did, not when he enjoyed it, but when he was taken from it; and we ſhould eſteem it, and uſe it while we may, as he wiſhed he had done when it was too late.

3. We ſhould not be exceſſively troubled if we meet with hardſhip and affliction here in this world; becauſe thoſe whom God deſigns for the greateſt happineſs hereafter, may *receive evil things* here. Thus our bleſſed Saviour, *the captain of our ſalvation, was made*

made perfect through ſufferings: This was the method which God uſed towards his own Son, firſt *he ſuffered, and then entered into glory.* He ſuffered more than any of us can bear; and yet he ſupported himſelf under all his ſufferings by the conſideration of the glory that would follow; *for the joy that was ſet before him, he endured the croſs, and deſpiſed the ſhame.*

The ſame conſideration ſhould arm us with patience and conſtancy under the greateſt evils of this life. The evils that we ly under are paſſing and going off; but the happineſs is to come. And if the happineſs of the next world were no greater, nor of longer continuance, than the miſeries of this world; or if they did equally anſwer one another; yet a wiſe man would chooſe to have miſery firſt, and his happineſs laſt. For if his happineſs were firſt, all the pleaſure and comfort of it would be eaten out by diſmal apprehenſions of what was to follow: but his ſufferings, if they were firſt, would be ſweetened by the conſideration of his future happineſs, and the bitterneſs of his ſufferings would give a quicker reliſh to his happineſs when it ſhould come, and make it greater.

But a good man under the ſufferings of this life, hath not only this comfort, that his happineſs *is to* come, but likewiſe that it ſhall be infinitely greater than his ſufferings; that theſe are but ſhort, but that ſhall never have an end. And this was that which fortified the firſt Chriſtians againſt all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do againſt them. They thought themſelves well paid, if *through many tribulations they might* at laſt *enter into the kingdom of God*; becauſe they believed that the joys of the next life would abundantly recompenſe all their labours and ſufferings in this world. They expected a mighty reward, far beyond all their ſufferings; they were firmly perſuaded that they ſhould be vaſt gainers at the laſt. So the Apoſtle tells us of himſelf, Rom. viii. 18. *I reckon that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall be revealed.* And to the ſame purpoſe, 2 Cor. iv. 17,

iv. 17, 18. *Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us an eternal weight of glory, whilſt we look not at the things which are ſeen, but at the things which are not ſeen; for the things which are ſeen are temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are eternal.* If we would conſider all things together, and fix our eyes as much upon the happineſs and glory of the next world, as upon the pomp and ſplendor of this; if we would look as much at *the things which are not ſeen*, as *the things which are ſeen*, we ſhould eaſily perceive, that he who ſuffers in this world does not renounce his happineſs, only puts it out to intereſt, upon terms of the greateſt advantage.

4. We ſhould do all things with a regard to our future and eternal ſtate. It matters not much what our condition is in this world, becauſe that is to continue but for a little while: but we ought to have a great and ſerious regard to that ſtate that never ſhall have an end. Therefore whenever we are doing any thing, we ſhould conſider what influence ſuch an action will have upon the happineſs or miſery of the next life. We ſhould meaſure every action and every condition of our lives by the reference of them to eternity. To be rich and great in this world will contribute nothing to our future happineſs; all theſe things which we ſo much dote upon, and purſue with ſo much eagerneſs, will not commend any man to God; they will ſignify nothing when we come to appear before our Judge. Death will ſtrip us of theſe things, and in the other world, the ſoul of the pooreſt man that ever lived ſhall be upon equal terms with the richeſt. Nothing but holineſs and virtue will then avail us; and it is but a little while and we ſhall all certainly be of this mind, that the beſt thing men can do in this world, is to provide for the other. I proceed to a

Fifth obſervation, that the ſtate of men in the next world is fixed and unchangeable; which I ground upon verſe 26. *Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, ſo that they that would paſs from hence to you cannot, neither can they paſs to us that would come*

come from thence. By which words our Saviour ſeems not only to intend, that they that are in heaven and hell can have no communication and intercourſe with one another; but likewiſe that they are lodged in an immutable ſtate. Thoſe that are happy are like to continue ſo; and thoſe that are miſerable are immutably fixed in that ſtate.

1. As to thoſe that are in happineſs there can be no great doubt. For what can tempt men that have ſo narrowly eſcaped the dangers and temptations of a wicked world, and are poſſeſſed of ſo great a happineſs by the free grace and mercy of God, to do any thing whereby they may forfeit their happineſs; or ſo much as to entertain a thought of offending that God, to whom they cannot but be ſenſible how infinitely they are obliged? In this imperfect ſtate few men have ſo little goodneſs as to ſin without temptation, but in that ſtate where men are perfectly good, and can have no temptation to be otherwiſe, it is not imaginable that they ſhould fall from that ſtate.

2. As to the ſtate of the damned, that that likewiſe is immutable the ſcripture does ſeem plainly enough to aſſert, when it calls it *an everlaſting deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord,* and uſes ſuch expreſſions to ſet forth the continuance of their miſery, as ſignify the longeſt and moſt interminable duration, expreſſions of as great an extent as thoſe which are uſed to ſignify the eternal happineſs of the bleſſed; and as large and unlimited, as any are to be had in thoſe languages wherein the ſcriptures are written.

Beſides that wicked men in the other world are in ſcripture repreſented as in the ſame condition with the devils, of whom there is no ground to believe that any of them ever did or will repent. Not becauſe repentance is impoſſible in its own nature to thoſe that are in extreme miſery; but becauſe there is no place left for it. Being under an irreverſible doom, there is no encouragement to repentance, no hope of mercy and pardon, without which repentance is impoſſible. For if a man did utterly deſpair

of

of pardon, and were assured upon good ground, that God would never shew mercy to him, in this case a man would grow desperate, and not care what he did. He that knows that whatever he does, he is miserable and undone, will not matter how he demeans himself. All motives to repentance are gone after a man once knows it will be to no purpose. And this the scripture seems to represent to us, as the case of the devils and damned spirits. Because their state is finally determined, and they are concluded under an irreversible sentence, therefore repentance is impossible to them.

Sorry, no doubt, they are, and heartily troubled that by their own sin and folly they have brought this misery upon themselves, and they cannot but conceive an everlasting displeasure against themselves, for having been the cause and authors of their own ruin; and the reflexion of this will be a perpetual spring of discontent, and fill their minds with eternal rage and vexation; and so long as they feel the intolerable punishments of sin, and groan under the insupportable torments of it, and see no end of this miserable state, no hope of getting out of it, they can be no otherwise affected, than with discontent to themselves, and rage and fury against God.

They are indeed penitent so far, as to be troubled at themselves for what they have done; but this trouble works no change and alteration in them; they still hate God who inflicts these punishments upon them, and who they believe is determined to continue them in this miserable state. The present anguish of their condition, and the despair of bettering it, makes them mad; and their minds are so distracted by the wildness of their passions, and their spirits so exasperated and set on fire by their own giddy motions, that there can be no rest and silence in their souls, not so much as the liberty of one calm and sedate thought.

Or if at any time they reflect upon the evil of their sins, and should entertain any thoughts of returning to God and their duty, they are presently

checked with this conſideration, that their caſe is determined, that God is implacably offended with them, and is inexorably and peremptorily reſolved to make them miſerable for ever; and during this perſuaſion, no man can return to the love of God and goodneſs, without which there can be no repentance.

This conſideration, of the immutable ſtate of men after this life, ſhould engage us with all ſeriouſneſs and diligence to endeavour to ſecure our future happineſs. God hath *ſet before us good and evil, life and death*, and we may yet *chooſe* which we pleaſe; but in the other world, we muſt ſtand to that choice which we have made here, and inherit the conſequences of it.

By ſin mankind is brought into a miſerable ſtate; but our condition is not deſperate and paſt remedy. God hath ſent his Son *to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remiſſion of ſins.* So that though our caſe be bad, it need not continue ſo, if it be not our own fault. There is a poſſibility now of changing our condition for the better, and of laying the foundation of a perpetual happineſs for ourſelves. The grace of God calls upon us, and is ready to aſſiſt us; ſo that no man's caſe is ſo bad, but there is a poſſibility of bettering it, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, and will make uſe of the grace which God offers, who is never wanting to the ſincere endeavours of men. Under the influence and aſſiſtance of this grace, thoſe who are *dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*, may *paſs from death to life*, may be *turned from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* So long as we are in this world there is a poſſibility of being tranſlated from one ſtate to another, from the *dominion of Satan, into the kingdom of God's dear Son.* But if we neglect the opportunities of this life, and ſtand out againſt the offers of God's grace and mercy, there will no overtures be made to us in the other world. After this life is ended, God will try us no more: our final miſcarriage in this world will prove fatal to us in the other, and we ſhall not be permitted

ted to live over again to correct our errors. *As the tree falls ſo it ſhall ly*; ſuch a ſtate as we are ſettled in, when we go out of this world, ſhall be fixt in the other, and there will be no poſſibility of changing it. We are yet *in the hand of our own counſel*, and by God's grace we may mould and faſhion our own fortune. But if we trifle away this advantage, we ſhall *fall into the hands of the living God*, out of which there is no redemption. God hath yet left heaven and hell to our choice, and we had need to look about us, and chooſe well, who can chooſe but once for all and for ever. There is yet a ſpace and opportunity left us of repentance; but ſo ſoon as we ſtep out of this life, and are entered upon the other world, our condition will be ſealed, never to be reverſed. And becauſe after this life there will be no further hopes of mercy, there will be no poſſibility of repentance. *This is the accepted time, this is the day of ſalvation*; *therefore to day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts*; *leſt God ſwear in his wrath that we ſhall not enter into his reſt.* I proceed to a

Sixth obſervation, that a ſtanding revelation of God is evidence ſufficient for divine things. *They have Moſes and the Prophets*; *let them hear them*; that is, they have the books of Moſes and the Prophets, written by men divinely inſpired, theſe do ſufficiently declare to them the will of God and their duty; and it is unreaſonable to demand or expect that God ſhould do more for their conviction and ſatisfaction.

I know very well the text ſpeaks only of the ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament, thoſe of the New being not then extant when this parable was delivered. But what is here ſaid concerning the ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament, is equally applicable to the New; and though Abraham does only recommend Moſes and the Prophets, there is no doubt but he would have ſaid the ſame concerning Chriſt and his Apoſtles, if the books of the New Teſtament had been then extant. So that what I ſhall ſay upon this obſervation, does indifferently concern the whole ſcripture.

And that I may make out this obſervation more fully, I ſhall take theſe five things into conſideration:

1*ſt*, What we are to underſtand by a divine revelation.

2*dly*, Give a brief account of the ſeveral kinds of it.

3*dly*, Shew what advantage this ſtanding revelation of the ſcriptures hath above any other way of conveying the will of God to the world.

4*thly*, That there is ſufficient evidence for the divinity of the ſcriptures.

5*thly*, That it is unreaſonable to expect that God ſhould do more for our conviction, than to afford ſuch a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will. I ſhall go over theſe as briefly as I can. I begin with the

1*ſt*, What we are to underſtand by a divine revelation. By a divine revelation we are to underſtand *a ſupernatural diſcovery or manifeſtation of any thing to us*; I ſay *ſupernatural*, becauſe it may either be immediately by God, or by the mediation of Angels, as moſt, if not all the revelations of the Old Teſtament were. *A ſupernatural diſcovery or manifeſtation*, either immediately to our minds, by our underſtandings and inward faculties; (for I do not ſo well underſtand the diſtinction between underſtanding and imagination, as to be careful to take notice of it,) or elſe mediately to our underſtandings by the mediation of our outward ſenſes, as by an external appearance to our bodily eyes, or by a voice and ſound to the ſenſe of hearing: *a diſcovery or manifeſtation of a thing*, whether it be ſuch as cannot be known at all by the uſe of our natural reaſon and underſtandings; or ſuch as may be diſcovered by natural light, but is more clearly revealed or made known, or we are awakened to a more particular and attentive conſideration of it. For it is not at all unſuitable to the wiſdom of God to make a *ſupernatural diſcovery* to us of ſuch things as may be known by the light of nature, either to give us a clearer manifeſtation of ſuch truths as were more obſcurely known,

known, and did as it were lie buried in our understandings; or else to quicken our minds to a more serious and lively consideration of those truths.

2dly, For the several kinds of divine revelations. That they were various, the Apostle to the Hebrews tells us, chap. i. 1. *God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake to the fathers by the Prophets*; where by Prophets we are to understand not only those who did foretel future things, but any person that was divinely inspired, and to whom God was pleased to make any supernatural discovery of himself.

Now the several kinds of revelation taken notice of by the Jews, are visions; dreams; prophecy; oracle; inspiration, or that which we call the Holy Ghost; voice *Bath-col*; or that which was the highest of all, which they call *gradus Mosaicus*, the degree of revelation which was peculiar to Moses. The Jewish writers, especially Maimonides, have many subtile observations about the differences of these several kinds of revelation, which depend upon subtile and philosophical distinctions of the faculties of perception, as that some of those revelations were by impression only upon the understanding; some only upon the imagination; some upon both; some upon the outward senses; but the simple and plain difference between them, so far as there is any ground in scripture to distinguish them, seems to be this; vision was a representation of something to a man when he was waking, in opposition to dreams, which were representations made to men in their sleep. Prophecy might be either dream or vision; and the Jews observe, that it was always one of these two ways, which they grounded upon Numb. xii. 6. *If there be a Prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known to him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.* But prophecy in the strict notion of it, had this peculiarly belonging to it, that it was not only monitory, or instructive, but did fortel some event of concernment to others; and the Jewish doctors tell us, that it was a clearer revelation, and carried a greater assurance along with

it, and that this was common to all the three, that there was ſomething of extaſy and tranſport of mind in all theſe.

The fourth ſort of revelation, which was by oracle, which is called *Urim* and *Thummim*, was a rendering of anſwers to queſtions, by the High-prieſt looking upon the ſtones in the breaſt-plate; which how it was done, is uncertain.

The fifth ſort of revelation is that which they call the Holy Ghoſt, which was a more calm and gentle inſpiration, without any extraordinary tranſport of mind or extaſy; ſuch as David had in the writing of the Pſalms.

The loweſt of all was that which they called *Bath-kol*, which was by a voice from heaven; and this is the way of revelation, which the Jews obſerved, did only continue among them from the days of the Prophet Malachi to our Saviour.

The higheſt of all was that which they called *gradus Moſaicus*, to which the Jews gave ſeveral prerogatives above all the other ways of revelation; as that it was done by impreſſion merely upon the underſtanding, without extaſy, or rapture, or tranſport, when he was waking, and in his ordinary temper, and his ſenſes not bound up either by extaſy or ſleep; that it was a revelation immediately from God himſelf, and not by the mediation of Angels, without any fear, or amazement, or fainting, which was incident to other Prophets; and the ſpirit of prophecy reſted upon him, and he could exert it arbitrarily, and put it forth when he would. Of which thus much is evidently true from the ſtory of him, that the ſpirit of prophecy did reſt more conſtantly upon him, and that he could exert it with greater freedom, and without any diſcernible amazement or tranſport from his ordinary temper. But that it was by impreſſion merely upon his underſtanding, as that is a diſtinct faculty from the imagination, is not ſo certain: that it was always by an immediate communication from God, without the mediation of Angels, ſeems not to be true; for St. Stephen tells us, that *the law was given by the diſpoſition of Angels*.

Acts

Acts vii. 53. And St. Paul, that it was *ordained by the Angels in the hand of a Mediator*, that is, Moſes, Gal. iii. 19. But that the revelation which was made to him, had ſome ſingular prerogatives above thoſe of other Propets, is plain from ſcripture, Numb. xii. 5, 6, 7, 8. when Aaron and Miriam contended with Moſes as being equal to him, God tells them that there was a vaſt difference between him and other Prophets; *Hear now my words, if there be a Prophet among you, I the Lord will make myſelf known unto him in a viſion, and will ſpeak unto him in a dream. My ſervant Moſes is not ſo——With him will I ſpeak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark ſpeeches*, &c. Exod. xxxiii. 11. *And the Lord ſpake unto Moſes face to face, as a man ſpeaketh unto his friend.* Deut. xxxiv. 10. *And there aroſe not a Prophet ſince in Iſrael like unto Moſes, whom the Lord knew face to face.* All which ſignify at leaſt this, that God made the cleareſt, and moſt familiar, and moſt perfect diſcoveries to Moſes of any of the Prophets; only our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, by whom God hath diſcovered his will to us under the New Teſtament, did excel Moſes; Moſes being but *a faithful ſervant*, that is, *humilis amicus*, a meaner ſort of friend; but *the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the only begotten Son of God*, who came from *the boſom of his Father*, and was intimately acquainted with the ſecrets of his will, and *had not the Spirit given him by meaſure*, but the moſt plentiful effuſion of it, being *anointed above his fellows.*

Now theſe being the ſeveral ſorts and degrees of revelation, which God hath made of himſelf to the world, the holy ſcriptures are a ſyſtem or collection of theſe, the authentick inſtrument or record, by which the things revealed any of theſe ways, are tranſmitted to us, and is therefore called *the word of God*, as containing thoſe things which God in ſeveral ages hath ſpoken to the world; that is, matters of divine revelation, which are neceſſary to be known by men, in order to their eternal happineſs. And this being now the great and ſtanding revelation of God, which is to continue to the end of the world, I intend to limit

limit my diſcourſe ſolely to this, as being the only revelation which we are concerned to enquire after.

And therefore in the *third* place, to ſhew you what advantage this ſtanding revelation of the ſcriptures hath above private revelations made to particular perſons, and frequently repeated and renewed in ſeveral ages; that ſo it may appear both agreeable to the wiſdom of God to ſettle revelations in this way, as being more commodious; and likewiſe to his goodneſs, it being a real privilege which theſe latter ages of the world enjoy, that they have a more fixt and certain way of being acquainted with the will of God, than thoſe ages had, which were governed by ſuch private revelations, as were now and then made to particular perſons. And the advantages are theſe:

1. It is a more certain way of conveyance of things, and more ſecure and free from impoſture. Suppoſe a revelation made to a particular perſon, which is of general concernment; that this may have a general and laſting effect, he muſt impart it to others, as many as he can, and give them the beſt aſſurance he can of it; and theſe muſt relate it to others; and ſo it muſt paſs from hand to hand, to be delivered from parents to their children. Now this way of conveying a revelation by oral report, muſt needs be liable to many uncertainties, both by involuntary miſtakes, through weakneſs of memory or underſtanding, and wilful falſifications and impoſtures, out of malice and deſign. So that the effect of an unrecorded revelation can neither be large nor laſting; it can but reach a few perſons, and continue a little while in its full credibility; and the further it goes, the weaker, like circles made in water, which the more they enlarge themſelves, and the longer they continue, the leſs diſcernible they are, till at length they quite diſappear. Whereas being once recorded by perſons ſecured from error, by ſupernatural and divine aſſiſtance, they are not liable to thoſe eaſy falſifications or miſtakes, which traditional reports and relations are neceſſarily, through human malice or weakneſs, liable to.

2. It

2. It is a more general and universal way of conveyance; which is evident from the common experience of the world, who have pitched upon this way of writing things in books, as that which doth most easily convey the knowledge and notice of things to the generality of men.

3. It is a more uniform way of conveyance; that is, things that are once written and propagated that way, ly equally open to all, and come in a manner with equal credit to all; it being not morally possible that a common book, that passeth through all hands, and which is of vast importance and concernment, should be liable to any material corruption, without a general conspiracy and agreement; which cannot be, but that it must be generally known. So that considering the commonness, and universal concernment of this book of the scriptures, all men are in a manner equally, that is, every man is sufficiently and competently assured of the credit of it; that is, that we are not in any material thing imposed upon by false copies. But in traditional revelation it is quite otherwise; tradition being a very unequal and ununiform way of conveyance. For seeing it may be of general concernment, and all cannot have it at the first hand, that is, immediately from him to whom it was made, but some at the second, others at the third, fourth or fifth hand, or much further off; the credit of it will be necessarily weakened by every remove. A report that comes through many hands, being like the argument we call *induction*; and as the strength and goodness of that depends upon the truth of every one of those instances that make it up, so that if any of them fail, the whole argument is naught; so the credit of a report that passeth through twenty hands, depends upon the integrity and sufficiency of all the relators; and whatever there is either of falshood and malice, or of incapacity of understanding, or frailty of memory in any of the relators, so much of weakness is derived into the report or testimony; and consequently the assurance which we can have of a private revelation,

which

which is delivered traditionally through a great many perſons, muſt needs be very unequal.

4. It is a more laſting way of conveyance. Which likewiſe appears by experience, we having now nothing at all of the hiſtory of ancient times, but what is conveyed down to us in writing.

5. It is a more human way of conveyance, which requires leſs of miracle and ſupernatural interpoſition for the preſervation of it. This book of the ſcriptures may with ordinary human care be tranſmitted entire, and free from any material error, to all ſucceeding ages: But revelations unwritten, if they have any laſting and conſiderable effect, they muſt at leaſt in every age be renewed and repeated; otherwiſe in a very ſhort ſpace, either through the unfaithfulneſs, or careleſſneſs and frailty of men, they will either be quite loſt, or ſo corrupted and depraved, that they will ſignify nothing.

From all which it appears that we have ſo little cauſe to murmur and repine at the providence of God, which in theſe latter ages of the world, does not make thoſe more immediate diſcoveries and manifeſtations of himſelf to us, that he did to former ages; that we have rather great reaſon to admire the wiſdom and goodneſs of God's providence, which hath privileged us with this ſtanding revelation of his written word, which hath ſo many ways the advantage of frequent and extraordinary revelation, and in reſpect of the generality of mankind, is much more uſeful and effectual to its end. I know there are ſome that have endeavoured to perſuade the world, that doctrines may much better be preſerved by common rumour and report, than by writing and record; but I hope there is no man ſo deſtitute of common ſenſe as to believe them, contrary to the experience of all men.

I come now to the *fourth* thing I propoſed to be conſidered, namely, that there is ſufficient evidence of the divinity of the ſcriptures. By the divinity of the ſcriptures, I mean, that they were revealed by God, and that the things contained in them were not invented by men, but diſcovered to men by God; and

and that the penmen of these books did not write their own private conceptions, but were inspired by the Holy Ghost. Now if we can be satisfied of this, we ought to receive the scriptures with the same reverence, as if an Angel from heaven should declare these things unto us, or as if God should immediately reveal them to our minds; for nothing can come with greater authority than this, that we believe it to be revealed by God; and provided we be assured of this, it matters not which way; the thing hath the same authority.

Now that we have sufficient evidence of the divinity of the scriptures, will best appear, by considering what is sufficient to give authority to a book, so that no prudent or reasonable man can question, but that the book was writ by him whose name it bears. For what evidence we would accept of for the authority of other books, we must not refuse in this case for the scriptures; if we do, we deal unequally; and it is a sign that we do not want evidence for the authority of the scriptures, but that we have no mind to believe them.

Now the utmost authority that any book is capable of, is, that it hath been transmitted down to us by the general and uncontrouled testimony of all ages, and that the authority of it was never questioned in that age wherein it was written, nor invalidated ever since.

And this evidence we have for the authority of the scriptures. As for the Old Testament, I shall not now labour in the proof of that by arguments proper to itself, but shall take the divinity of them upon the authority of the New; which if it be proved, is sufficient evidence for it, though there were no other.

Now for the scriptures of the New Testament, I desire but these two things to be granted to me at first:

1. That all were written by those persons whose names they bear: and for this we have as much authority as for any books in the world, and so much

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as may ſatisfy men in other caſes, and therefore not to be rejected in this.

2. That thoſe who wrote thoſe books were men of integrity, and did not wilfully falſify in any thing; and this cannot reaſonably be denied, becauſe theſe very perſons gave the utmoſt evidence that men could give of their integrity. The higheſt atteſtation that any man can give of the truth of what he relates, is to lay down his life for the teſtimony of it; and this the Apoſtles did.

Now if this be granted, that they did not falſify in their relations concerning the miracles of Chriſt, and his reſurrection, and the miraculous gifts which were beſtowed upon the Apoſtles after his aſcenſion; this is as great an evidence as the world can give, and as the thing is capable of, that our Saviour was *a teacher come from God*, and that the Apoſtles were extraordinarily aſſiſted by the Holy Ghoſt; and if this be granted, what can be deſired more to prove the divinity of their writings?

But it may be ſaid, that though the Apoſtles were granted to be men of integrity, and that they did not wilfully falſify in their relations, yet they might be miſtaken about thoſe matters: But that they were not, we have as much evidence as can be for any thing of this nature, namely, that the things which are related are plain ſenſible matters of fact, about which no man need miſtake, unleſs he will; and they did not write things upon the report of others, who might poſſibly have deſigns to deceive, but upon the ſureſt evidence in the world, their own knowledge and the teſtimony of their ſenſes; *the things that we have ſeen and heard teſtify we unto you.* So that if they were miſtaken in theſe things, no man can be ſure of any thing; and by the ſame reaſon that we disbelieve the authority of the ſcriptures upon this account, we muſt believe nothing at all. This is in ſhort the whole force of the argument for the divinity of the ſcriptures, which I might have enlarged infinitely upon; but I deſign now only briefly to repreſent to you, that we, who live at the diſtance of ſo many ages from the time of this revelation,

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are not deſtitute of ſufficient evidence for the authority of the ſcriptures, and ſuch evidence, as they who reject in other caſes, are eſteemed unreaſonable.

I ſhould come now to the

5*th*, and laſt thing, namely, that it is unreaſonable to expect, that God ſhould do more for our conviction, than to afford us a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will, ſuch as the books of the holy ſcriptures are. But this I ſhall refer to another opportunity, in a particular diſcourſe upon the 31ſt verſe, which contains the main deſign, the ſum and ſubſtance of this whole parable.

SERMON CXXVIII.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Preached at Whitehall, *Anno* 1678.

LUKE xvi. 31.

If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.

The third ſermon on this text.

THeſe words are the concluſion of that excellent parable of our Saviour concerning the rich man and Lazarus, and they are the final anſwer which Abraham gives to the rich man's laſt requeſt; who being in great torment, and not able to obtain any eaſe for himſelf, is repreſented as concerned for his relations, whom he had left behind him upon earth, leſt they alſo by their own careleſsneſs and folly ſhould plunge themſelves into the ſame mi-

miſery that he was in; and therefore he begs of Abraham, that he would *ſend Lazarus to* his *father's houſe*, where he had *five brethren, that he might teſtify unto them, leſt they alſo ſhould come into that place of torment*. To which requeſt Abraham anſwers, that there was no neceſſity of ſuch an extraordinary courſe to be uſed towards thoſe who had ſufficient means of conviction ſo near at hand, if they would but hearken to them, and make uſe of them. *Abraham ſaith unto him, They have Moſes and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

But the rich man preſſeth his requeſt further, upon this reaſon, that they might not perhaps be moved by *Moſes* and *the Prophets*, nay, it was likely they would not be moved by them; for they had always had them, and yet they remained impenitent: But if a ſpecial meſſenger ſhould be ſent to them from the dead, this certainly could not fail to awaken them, and bring them to repentance, ver. 30. *And he ſaid, nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* To which Abraham makes this peremptory reply, *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.*

In which words Abraham abſolutely denies that there is any ſuch probability, much leſs certainty that thoſe who reject a publick credible revelation of God, ſuch as that of the holy ſcripture is, ſhould be effectually convinced by a meſſenger from the dead. And our Saviour brings in Abraham delivering himſelf very poſitively in this matter, and therefore we may preſume it to be our Saviour's own ſenſe, and may rely upon it for a truth; which however at firſt ſight it may not be ſo evident, ye I hope in the progreſs of this diſcourſe to make it ſufficiently clear.

But before I undertake that, I ſhall premiſe a caution or two to prevent all miſtake in this matter.

Firſt, That we are not to underſtand theſe words too ſtrictly and rigorouſly, as if the thing were ſimply

ſimply and in itſelf impoſſible, that a man who is not convinced by hearing or reading *Moſes* and *the Prophets*, ſhould be brought to repentance any other way. For it is very poſſible in the nature of the thing, yea, and likely enough, that a man who is not convinced by calm evidence and perſuaſion, may yet be very much wrought upon by a ſtrange and amazing accident; and if one, whom he had known when he was alive, ſhould appear to him from the dead, and declare the certainty of a future ſtate, and the condition of things in another world, there is little doubt to be made, but that this would more rouze and awaken him to conſider his danger, than all the threatenings of God's word; and it is very poſſible that by the concurrence of God's grace, this might prove an effectual means to convince ſuch a man, and to bring him to repentance. And yet for all this, it is not probable upon the whole matter, and if all circumſtances be duly conſidered, that this ſhould generally have a permanent effect upon men, ſo as throughly to reclaim ſuch perſons as do obſtinately reſiſt the light and counſels of God's word.

Secondly, Another caution I would give is this, that we are not to underſtand theſe words ſo, as to weaken the force of that argument from miracles for the proof and confirmation of a divine doctrine; as if our Saviour intended to inſinuate, that miracles are not a proper and ſufficient argument to convince men. For our Saviour does not here oppoſe *Moſes* and *the Prophets* to a miraculous teſtimony; but he advanceth the publick evidence and teſtimony which *Moſes* and *the Prophets* had above the evidence of a ſingle and private miracle; for *Moſes* and *the Prophets* had their confirmation from miracles; and miracles are the great evidence and atteſtation which God hath always given to the divinity of any perſon or doctrine; and therefore Abraham cannot be thought to ſpeak any thing to the prejudice of miracles, when he ſays, *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.* Nay, ſo far is he from

that, that this reaſoning of his is rather for the advantage of miracles. For *Moſes* and *the Prophets* had the confirmation of many and great, of publick and unqueſtionable miracles; a credible relation whereof was conveyed down to after-ages. So that if rational means of conviction were the thing deſired, it was not likely that thoſe, who were not perſuaded by *Moſes* and *the Prophets*, which were acknowledged by themſelves to have had the confirmation of ſo many undoubted miracles, ſhould in reaſon be convinced by a private and ſingle miracle.

Theſe conſiderations being premiſed by way of caution, I come now to make out the truth of what is here aſſerted in the text. And for the full clearing of this matter, I ſhall ſpeak to theſe two propoſitions:

Firſt, That it is unreaſonable to expect that God ſhould do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will; ſuch as that of the holy ſcriptures is. And if ſo, then,

Secondly, That upon the whole matter it is very improbable, that thoſe who reject this publick revelation of God, ſhould be effectually convinced, though one ſhould ſpeak to them from the dead.

Firſt, That it is unreaſonable to expect that God ſhould do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will; ſuch as that of the holy ſcriptures is. This is ſtrongly implied in Abraham's firſt anſwer, *They have Moſes and the Prophets, let them hear them*; as if he had ſaid, having ſuch means of conviction ſo near at hand, why ſhould they deſire and expect any other? It is in this caſe of the ſcriptures as in that of God's providence; God does not commonly prove his providence to men by extraordinary inſtances of his power, and by changing the courſe of nature, to convince every man in the world that he governs it: but by ſtanding teſtimonies of his wiſdom and power, and goodneſs; by theſe God does ſufficiently ſatisfy conſiderate men of his gover-

vernment and care of the world; and though he do ſeldom manifeſt himſelf in ſupernatural and extraordinary ways, yet he hath not left himſelf without a witneſs, by the conſtant courſe of nature, in the returns of day and night, in the revolutions of the ſeaſons of the year, *in that he gives us rain from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons, filling our hearts with food and gladneſs.* And theſe ſtanding arguments of his providence, though they be not ſo much taken notice of, becauſe they are ſo common, yet they are daily miracles, and we can hardly imagine greater, and we ſhould be ſtrangely amazed at them, but that they are ſo very frequent and familiar.

The caſe is the ſame as to divine revelation. God hath not thought fit to gratify the perverſe curioſity of men, by affording to every man a particular and immediate revelation of his mind and will: but he hath given us a ſtanding revelation, which at firſt had the greateſt and moſt miraculous confirmation, and he hath ſtill left us ſufficient means of being aſſured of the truth of this revelation, and of the confirmation that was at the firſt given to it; and we tempt God, by demanding extraordinary ſigns, when we may receive ſo abundant ſatisfaction in an ordinary way. This being admitted, I ſhall proceed in the

Second place to ſhew, that it is upon the whole matter, and all circumſtances conſidered, very improbable, that thoſe who reject this publick revelation from God, ſhould be effectually convinced, though one ſhould ſpeak to them from the dead. And this is that which is expreſly aſſerted here in the text, *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.* Not but that any man would be very much ſtartled and amazed, if one ſhould come from the dead to warn him out of the danger of his wicked life; but yet for all that it is very unlikely that they who obſtinately and perverſely refuſe to be convinced by *Moſes* and *the Prophets*, would be effectually perſuaded, (that is, ſo as to be brought

to repentance and reformation of their lives) *though one should rise from the dead.* And that for these reasons:

1. Because if such miracles were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect; and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all.

2. Men have as great or greater reason to believe the threatenings of God's word, as the discourse of one that should speak to them from the dead.

3. The very same reason which makes men to reject the counsels of God in his word, would in all probability hinder them from being convinced by a particular miracle.

4. Experience does abundantly testify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince those who are obstinately addicted and wedded to their lusts.

5. An effectual persuasion (that is, such a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of God, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of God's grace, which there is no reason to expect either in an extraordinary way, or in an extraordinary degree, after men have obstinately rejected the ordinary means which God hath appointed to that end.

1. If such miracles, as a special messenger from the dead to warn and admonish men, were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect upon them: and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all. For it is unreasonable at first sight, that the worst and most obstinate sort of sinners should expect this, as a peculiar favour and privilege to themselves, and that God should not do as much for others, who have deserved it more, and would probably make better use of it; and if these things were common, it is very probable that men would not be much moved by them. It may be, while the apprehension of such a thing were fresh upon

on them, they would take up ſome good reſolutions, as ſinners uſually do, while they are under preſent convictions of conſcience, and the hand of God, by ſome great affliction or ſickneſs, lies heavy upon them: but ſtill they would be apt to defer their repentance, and put it off until the preſent amazement were a little over, and the terror of their firſt apprehenſions were abated and worn off by degrees, and after a little while they would return to their former courſe. And this is too probable, from what we ſee men do in other caſes not very much remote from this. It is a very terrible and amazing thing to ſee a man dy, and ſolemnly take his laſt leave of the world. The very circumſtances of dying men are apt to ſtrike us with horror: to hear ſuch a man how ſenſibly he will ſpeak of the other world, as if he were juſt come from it, rather than going to it; how ſeverely he will condemn himſelf for the folly and wickedneſs of his life; with what paſſion he will wiſh that he had lived better, and ſerved God more ſincerely; how ſeriouſly will he reſolve upon a better life, if God would be pleaſed to raiſe him up, and try him but once more; with what zeal and earneſtneſs he will commend to his beſt friends and neareſt relations a religious and virtuous courſe of life, as the only thing that will miniſter comfort to them when they come to be in his condition. Such diſcourſes as theſe are very apt to move and affect men for the time, and to ſtir up in them very good reſolutions, whilſt the preſent fit and impreſſion laſts: but becauſe theſe ſights are very frequent, they have ſeldom any great and permanent effect upon men. Men conſider that it is a very common caſe, and ſinners take example and encouragement from one another; every one is affected for the preſent, but few are ſo effectually convinced, as to betake themſelves to a better courſe.

And if apparitions from the dead were as common as it is for men to dy, we may reaſonably preſume that the diſcourſes of dead and dying, of thoſe that are going, and thoſe who come from the dead, would

would have much the ſame effect upon the generality of men.

But if we ſuppoſe this a ſingular caſe, (which there is no reaſon to do) in that caſe the effect would probably be this; a man that was ſtrongly addicted to his luſts, and had no mind to leave them, would be apt, when the fright was over, to be eaſily perſuaded that all this was merely the work of fancy and imagination; and the rather becauſe ſuch things did not happen to others as well as to himſelf.

2. We have as great or greater reaſon to believe the warnings or threatenings of God's word, as the diſcourſes of one that ſhould come to us from the dead. For the threatenings of God's word againſt ſuch ſins as natural light convinceth men of, have the natural guilt and fears of men on their ſide, the particular teſtimony of every man's conſcience, and the concurring teſtimony of mankind to the probability of the thing; and to give us full aſſurance of the truth and reality of them, we have a credible relation of great and unqueſtionable miracles wrought on purpoſe to give teſtimony to thoſe perſons who denounced thoſe threatenings, that they came from God. So that here is a very publick and authentick teſtimony given to the threatenings of God's word, more ſuitable to the generality of mankind, and of greater authority than a private apparition, or a ſingle miracle; and if *that* will not convince men, why ſhould we ſuppoſe that *this* will?

3. The very ſame reaſon which makes men to *reject the counſels of God* in his word, would, in all probability, hinder men from being convinced by an apparition from the dead. It is not generally for want of evidence that men do not yield a full and effectual aſſent to the truth of God's word, I mean; that they do not believe it ſo as to obey it; but from the intereſt of ſome luſt. The true cauſe is not in mens underſtandings, and becauſe there is not reaſon enough to ſatisfy them, that the ſcriptures are the word of God: but in the obſtinacy of their wills, which are enſlaved to their luſts. And the

the diſeaſe being there, it is not to be cured by more evidence, but by more conſideration, and by the grace of God, and better reſolutions.

The man is addicted to ſome vice or other, and that makes him unwilling to entertain thoſe truths which would check and controul him in his courſe. The light of God's word is offenſive to him, and therefore he would ſhut it out. This account our bleſſed Saviour gives of the enmity of the Jews againſt him and his doctrine, John iii. 19. *Light is come into the world, and men love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil; for every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.* Upon the ſame account it is, that men reſiſt the doctrine of the holy ſcriptures; not becauſe they have ſufficient reaſon to doubt of their divine authority; but becauſe they are unwilling to be governed by them, and to conform their lives to the laws and precepts of that holy book: For the wills of men have a great influence upon their underſtandings, to make aſſent eaſy or difficult; and as many are apt to aſſent to what they have a mind to, ſo they are ſlow to believe any thing which croſſeth their humours and inclinations; ſo that though greater evidence were offered, it is likely, it would not prevail with them, becauſe the matter does not ſtick there. Their wills are diſtempered, *men hate to be reformed,* and this makes them *caſt the laws of God behind their backs*; and if God himſelf ſhould ſpeak to them from heaven, as he did to the people of Iſrael, yet for all that, they might continue *a ſtiff-necked and rebellious people.* Though the evidence were ſuch as their underſtandings could not reſiſt; yet their wills might ſtill hold out, and the preſent condition of their minds might have no laſting influence upon their hearts and lives; ſuch a violent conviction might affect them for the preſent; but the ſenſe of it might perhaps wear off by degrees, and then they would return to their former hardneſs. Men by a long and obſtinate continu-

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ance in ſin, may bring themſelves to the temper and diſpoſition of devils; who though *they believe and tremble* at the thoughts of God and his threatenings, yet they are wicked ſtill; for ſo long as men retain a ſtrong affection for their luſts, they will break through all conviction, and what evidence ſoever be offered to them, they will find ſome way or other to avoid it, and to delude themſelves. The plain truth of the caſe is this, (if men will honeſtly ſpeak their conſciences, they cannot deny it) they do not call for more evidence, either becauſe they want it, or are willing to be convinced by it, but that they may ſeem to have ſome excuſe for themſelves for not being convinced by that evidence which is afforded to them.

4*thly*, Experience does abundantly teſtify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince and reclaim men of depraved minds, and ſuch as are obſtinately addicted to their luſts. We find many remarkable experiments of this in the hiſtory of the Bible. What wonders were wrought in the ſight of Pharaoh and the Egyptians! yet they were hardened under all theſe plagues. Balaam, who *greedily followed the wages of unrighteouſneſs*, was not to be ſtopt by the admonition of an Angel. The Jews, after ſo many miracles which their eyes had ſeen, continued to be *a ſtiff-necked and gainſaying people*; ſo that it is hard to ſay which was more prodigious, the wonders which God wrought for them, or their rebellions againſt him; and when *in the fulneſs of time*, the Son of God came, and did among them *the works which never man did*, ſuch as one would have thought might have brought the worſt people in the world to repentance, thoſe of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet they repented not. Yea the very thing which the rich man here in my text requeſted of Abraham for his brethren, was done among them; *Lazarus* did *riſe from the dead*, and *teſtified unto them, and they were not perſuaded.*

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And which is yet more, our Saviour himſelf according to his own prediction, while he was alive, *roſe again from the dead the third day*, and was viſibly taken up into heaven; and yet how few among them did believe, and *give glory to God?* So that we ſee the very things here ſpoken of in the text made good in a famous inſtance; they who *believed not Moſes and Prophets*, which teſtified of the *Meſſias*, were *not perſuaded* when he *roſe from the dead.*

And does not our own experience tell us, how little effect the extraordinary providences of God have had upon thoſe who were not reclaimed by his word? It is not long ſince God ſhewed himſelf among us, by *terrible things in righteouſneſs*, and viſited us with three of his ſoreſt judgments, war, and peſtilence, and fire; and yet how does all manner of wickedneſs and impiety ſtill reign and rage among us. It is a very ſad conſideration to ſee how little thoſe who have outlived the plagues, have been reformed by them; *we have not returned to the Lord, nor ſought him for all this.*

I may appeal to the experience of particular perſons. How frequently do we ſee men, after great afflictions, and tedious ſufferings, and dangerous ſickneſſes, return to their former evil courſes! and though they have been upon the brink of eternity, and *the terrors of death have compaſſed them about, and the pains of hell have* almoſt *taken hold of them*, though they have had as lively and ſenſible convictions of another world, as if they had ſpoken with thoſe that had come from thence, or even been there themſelves; yet they have taken no warning, but upon their deliverance and recovery, have been as mad, as furious ſinners as they were before! So that it ought to be no ſuch wonder to us, which the text tells us, *that if men hear not Moſes and the Prophets; neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.* Eſpecially, if we conſider in the

5*th*, and laſt place, that an effectual perſuaſion (that is, ſuch a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of God, and depends upon the operation

tion and concurrence of his grace, which is not to be expected in an extraordinary way, where men have obſtinately rejected the ordinary means appointed by God for that end. To be effectually perſuaded to change our lives, and become new men, is a work not to be done without the aſſiſtance of God's grace; and there is little reaſon to expect that God will afford his grace to thoſe who reject and deſpiſe the counſels of his word. The doctrine of ſalvation contained in the holy ſcriptures, and the promiſes and threatenings of God's word are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the converſion of men, and to bring them to repentance; and if we ſincerely uſe theſe means, we may confidently expect the concurrence of God's grace to make them effectual: but if we neglect and reſiſt theſe means, in confidence that God ſhould attempt our recovery by ſome extraordinary ways; though he ſhould gratify our preſumptuous and unreaſonable curioſity, ſo far as to ſend *one from the dead to teſtify unto us*, yet we have no reaſon to expect the aſſiſtance of his grace, to make ſuch a conviction effectual to our repentance, when we have ſo long deſpiſed his word, and reſiſted his Spirit, which are *the power of God unto ſalvation.*

Without his grace and aſſiſtance, the moſt probable means will prove ineffectual to alter and change our corrupt natures; *by grace we are ſaved*, and *that not of ourſelves, it is the gift of God.* This grace is revealed to us in the goſpel; and the aſſiſtances of it are conveyed to us by the goſpel; and it is great preſumption to promiſe to ourſelves the aſſiſtance of God's grace in any other way than he hath been pleaſed to promiſe it to us.

And thus I have ſhewn you, as briefly and plainly as I could, how unlikely it is, that thoſe who obſtinately reject a clear and publick revelation of God, ſhould be effectually convinced and brought to repentance by any apparitions from the dead.

I ſhall only make two or three inferences from this diſcourſe which I have made, and ſo conclude.

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1ſt, Since the ſcriptures are the publick and ſtanding revelation of God's will to men, and the ordinary means of ſalvation, we may hence conclude, that people ought to have them in ſuch a language as they can underſtand. This our Saviour plainly ſuppoſeth in the diſcourſe which he repreſents between Abraham and the rich man, deſiring that Lazarus might be ſent from the dead *to his brethren to teſtify unto them:* To which requeſt Abraham would not have given this anſwer and advice, *They have Moſes and the Prophets, let them hear them,* had he ſuppoſed that the ſcriptures then were, or for the future ought to be, lockt up from the people in an unknown tongue; for the rich man might very well have replied, *Nay, father Abraham,* but they are not permitted to have *Moſes and the prophets* in ſuch a language as they can underſtand; and therefore there is more need why *one ſhould be ſent from the dead to teſtify unto them.*

Nor would Abraham have ſaid again, *if they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded.* For how ſhould men hear what they cannot underſtand, ſo as to be perſuaded by it?

It is evident then, that our Saviour according to the reaſoning of this parable, takes it for granted, that the holy ſcriptures are the ſtanding and ordinary means of bringing men to faith and repentance, and that the people are to have the free uſe of them. But ſince our Saviour's time, the church of Rome hath found a mighty inconvenience in this, and therefore hath taken the ſcriptures out of the hands of the people. They will not now let them have *Moſes and the Prophets,* the goſpel of our bleſſed Saviour, and the writings of his Apoſtles, becauſe they are really afraid they ſhould *hear them,* and by hearing of them, be convinced and perſuaded of the errors and corruptions of their church; but inſtead of the ſcriptures of the Old and New Teſtament, they have put into their hands a legend of famous apparitions of men from the dead, teſtifying unto them concerning purgatory and tranſubſtantiation, and the worſhip of the bleſſed Virgin and the ſaints, and the

great benefit and refreſhment which ſouls in purgatory have by the indulgences of the Pope, and the prayers of the living put up to Saints and Angels on their behalf; ſo that in the church of Rome, quite contrary to our Saviour's method, men are perſuaded of their religion, of their new articles of faith, and ways of worſhip, not by Moſes and the Prophets, not by the doctrine of the holy ſcriptures, (for they every where teſtify againſt them) but by abſurd romances, and ill-contrived fictions of apparitions from the dead. I will diſmiſs this matter with this one obſervation, that however intereſted and confident men may ſet a bold face upon any thing, yet it cannot to conſiderate men but ſeem a very hard caſe, that there ſhould be no ſalvation to be had out of the church of Rome; and yet the ordinary, and (in our Saviour's judgment) the moſt effectual means of ſalvation are not to be had in it.

But I paſs from this, to that which does more immediately concern our practice.

2*dly*, Let us hear and obey that publick revelation of God's will, which, in ſo much mercy to mankind, he hath been pleaſed to afford to us. This is an ineſtimable privilege and advantage which the world in many ages was deſtitute of, having no other guide to conduct them to eternal happineſs but the light of nature, and ſome particular revelations, which now and then God was pleaſed to make of his will to men: But now God hath ſet up a great and ſtanding light in the world, the doctrines of the holy ſcriptures; and by the goſpel of his bleſſed Son, hath *given the knowledge of ſalvation to all men, for the remiſſion of their ſins, through the tender mercies of God, whereby the day-ſpring from on high hath viſited us; to give light to them that ſit in darkneſs and in the ſhadow of death, and to guide our feet in the way of peace*, to convince us of the error of our ways, and to direct us in our duy. *We upon whom the ends of the world are come*, do enjoy all the advantages of divine revelation which the world ever had, and as great as the world ever ſhall have. *God in theſe laſt days hath ſpoken unto us by his Son*, and if we will not hear

hear him, God will employ no other extraordinary Prophet and Meſſenger to us. *If the wrath of God ſo clearly revealed from heaven by the goſpel of our bleſſed Saviour againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men*; if the terror of the great day, and the fear of eternal torment; if the dreadful ſufferings of the Son of God for our ſins, and the merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood, and the glorious hopes of eternal life and happineſs will not prevail with us to leave our ſins, and to amend our lives, we have no reaſon to expect that God ſhould uſe any further means to reclaim us; that he ſhould ever make any more attempts for our recovery. And therefore,

3*dly*, and *laſtly*, Thoſe who are not brought to repentance, and effectually perſuaded by this clear and publick revelation which God hath made of his will to men in the holy ſcriptures, have reaſon to look upon their caſe as deſperate.

Methinks it ſhould not be a deſirable thing to any of us to be convinced by an apparition, the thing is ſo dreadful and full of terror; beſides, that it argues men to be ſtrangely hardened in a bad courſe, and obſtinately bent upon their evil ways, when nothing will affright them from their ſins, but what will almoſt put them out of their wits; when nothing will keep them from running into hell, but a fearful and ghaſtly meſſenger from thence. What a terrible ſight would it be to any of us, to meet one of our companions, whom we had lately known in this world, freſh come out of thoſe flames, with the ſmell of fire and brimſtone upon him! What imagination can paint to itſelf the dread and horror of ſuch a ſpectacle! The rich man here in the parable, when he was in hell, is repreſented as ſenſible of the inconvenience of this; and therefore he did not deſire to be ſent himſelf to his brethren, but deſired that Lazarus might go and teſtify unto them: He was apprehenſive how frightful a ſight he himſelf muſt needs have been to them; and therefore he deſires that they might have a gentle warning by one, who from out of Abraham's boſom had ſeen the

miſeries of the damned, but enjoyed the ſtate of the bleſſed.

But let not us tempt God by any ſuch unreaſonable demand, who ſpeaks to us every day by the plain declarations of his word, and hath of late years called ſo loudly upon us by the voice of his providence, to repent and turn to him; by ſo many miracles of mercy and deliverance, as God hardly ever wrought for any Prince and people, and by ſuch terrible volleys of judgments, and full *viols of wrath*, as have ſeldom been poured out upon any nation. God ſpeaks to you by his miniſters, men like yourſelves (God knows, poor frail and ſinful men!) but we are ſure, that when we call you to repentance, we deliver to you the will and pleaſure, the counſels and commands of the great God, which (whatever account may be made of us) do certainly challenge your moſt awful attention and regard. And we are ſenſible that we are called to a very difficult and unpleaſant work, to contend with the luſts and vices of men, to ſtrive againſt the ſtrong and impetuous ſtreams of a wicked and perverſe generation; and nothing in the world could move us to this unwelcome and grievous importunity, but a great and juſt ſenſe of our own duty, and your danger. And if we will not take theſe warnings, why ſhould we expect that God ſhould vouchſafe to ſend an expreſs meſſenger to us from the other world, to certify us how all things are there, and that not ſo much to help the weakneſs of our faith, as to humour the perverſeneſs of our infidelity? And why ſhould we imagine that this courſe would prove more effectual? *Let us not deceive ourſelves*, the ſame luſts which now detain men ſo ſtrongly in impenitency and unbelief, would, in all probability, hurry them on to hell, though an Angel from heaven ſhould meet them in their way, to give a ſtop to them. This indeed might ſtartle us; but nothing is like to ſave us, if the word of God and his grace do not.

But are we in earneſt, and would we *be perſuaded if one ſhould riſe from the dead?* God hath condeſcended thus far to us, there is *one riſen from the dead*

to

to teſtify unto us, Jeſus the Son of God, who *died for our ſins, and roſe again for our juſtification,* and is aſcended into heaven, and ſet down at the right hand of God, to aſſure us of a bleſſed reſurrection, and a glorious immortality. And if this will not ſatisfy us, God will gratify our curioſity no farther. If we *will not believe him whom God hath ſent,* and, to convince us that he hath ſent him, hath *raiſed him up from the dead, we ſhall dy in our ſins,* and periſh in our impenitency. God hath in great mercy to mankind done that which is abundantly ſufficient to convince thoſe who are of a teachable temper and diſpoſition: but in great wiſdom and juſtice he hath not thought fit to provide any remedy for the wilful obſtinacy and intractable perverſeneſs of men.

Now God, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, perſuades us all *to break off our ſins by repentance, and to give glory to God,* before death and darkneſs come, and the day of our final viſitation overtake us, when we may perhaps be ſurprized by a ſudden ſtroke, or ſeized upon by a violent diſeaſe, and may have no ſenſe and apprehenſion of our approaching danger; or if we have, *may find no place for repentance, though we ſeek it with tears;* which God grant may never happen to be the caſe of any of us, for his mercies ſake in Chriſt Jeſus. *To whom with the Father,* &c.

SERMON CXXIX.

The children of this world wiſer than the children of light.

Preached at Whitehall, *Anno* 1684.

LUKE xvi. 8.

For the children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light.

THeſe words are in the parable of the rich man's ſteward, who being called upon to give up his accompts, in order to his being diſcharged from his office, caſt about with himſelf, what courſe he had beſt to take, to provide for his ſubſiſtence, when he ſhould be turned out of his employment. At laſt he reſolves upon this; that he will go to his Lord's debtors, and take a favourable account of them; and inſtead of *a hundred meaſures of oil, write down fifty*; and inſtead of *a hundred meaſures of wheat, write down fourſcore*; that by this means he might oblige them to be kind to him in his neceſſity. The Lord hearing of this, commends the unjuſt ſteward, *becauſe he had done wiſely*; that is, he took notice of his diſhoneſty, but praiſed his ſhrewdneſs and ſagacity, as having done prudently for himſelf, though he did not deal juſtly with him. And this is uſual among men; when we ſee a man ingeniouſly bad, to commend his wit, and to ſay it is great pity he doth not uſe it better, and apply it to good purpoſes. Upon the whole, our Saviour makes this obſervation; *that the children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the*

children of light; as if he had ſaid, thus did the worldly wiſe man; thus provident was he for his future ſecurity and ſubſiſtence. He no ſooner underſtands that he is to be turned out of his office, but he conſiders what proviſion to make for himſelf againſt that time. And is it not pity, that good men do not apply this wiſdom to better and greater purpoſes? For is not every man ſuch a ſteward, intruſted by God with the bleſſings of this life, and many opportunities of doing good? For all which, ſince he muſt ſhortly give an account, he ought in all reaſon ſo to uſe them, as thereby to provide for the happineſs of another life, againſt this temporal life have an end.

And this is all the parallel intended in this parable, as we may ſee by our Saviour's application of it. For parables are not to be ſtretched to an exact parallel in all the parts and circumſtances of them, but only to be applied to the particular point and purpoſe intended. A parable, and the moral accommodation of it, being (as one well obſerves) not like two planes, which touch one another in every part, but like a globe upon a plane, which only toucheth in one point. Thus our Saviour ſeparates the wiſdom of this ſteward from his injuſtice, and propoſeth that to our imitation; *The children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light.*

The words are a compariſon; in which we have,

1*ſt*, The perſons compared, *the children of this world*, and the *children of light*. It is a very uſual phraſe among the Hebrews, when they would expreſs any thing to partake of ſuch a nature or quality, to call it the ſon or child of ſuch a thing. Thus good men are called *the children of God*, and bad men *the children of the Devil*; thoſe who mind earthly things, and make the things of this world their greateſt aim and deſign, are called *the children of this world*; and thoſe who are better enlightened with the knowledge of their own immortality, and the belief of a future ſtate after this life, are called *the children of light*.

2*dly*, Here

2*dly*, Here is the thing wherein they are compared, and that is, as to their wiſdom and prudence.

3*dly*, The object of this prudence, which is not the ſame in both; as if the ſenſe were, that *the children of this world are wiſer than the children of light*, as to the things of this world; but here are two ſeveral objects intended, about which the prudence of theſe two ſorts of perſons is reſpectively exerciſed; the concernments of this world and the other. And our Saviour's meaning is, that *the children of this world are wiſer in their generation*, that is, in *their way*, *viz.* as to the intereſts and concernments of this world, *than the children of light* are in *theirs*, *viz.* as to the intereſts and concernments of the other world.

4*thly*, Here is a deciſion of the matter, and which of them it is that excels in point of prudence, in *their way*; and our Saviour gives it to *the children of this world*; *they are wiſer in their generation than the children of light*.

Now this propoſition is not to be taken in the utmoſt ſtrictneſs and rigor; as if it were univerſally true, and without any exception, as if no man had ever been ſo wiſe and provident for his ſoul, and the concernments of another world, as worldly men are for the intereſts and concernments of this life. For there are ſome that are fools at large, and imprudent in their whole conduct and management, both as to the affairs of this world, and the other; who are in too ſtrict a ſenſe, *the children of this world*: They mind nothing but this world, and yet are groſsly imprudent, even in their proſecution of their temporal intereſts: They neglect and forego all other worldly advantages, for the ſake of a little ſenſual pleaſure; and then they loſe and deſtroy that too, by an over-hot and eager purſuit of it, and turn it at laſt into gall and wormwood. And there are others (as St. Paul for inſtance) who, I doubt not, have been as prudent and zealous, and induſtrious for the promoting of religion, and the ſalvation of themſelves and others, as any man can be about the affairs of this preſent life; and I hope there are ſome ſuch

ſuch in every age; but God knows they are very few, and their wiſdom and induſtry is ſeldom ſo equal, and conſtant, and uniform, as that of *the men of this world.*

So that we are to underſtand this ſaying of our Saviour's with the ſame allowance as we generally do all moral and proverbial ſpeeches, that they are true for the moſt part; and the inſtances and exceptions to the contrary are very rare. It is ſeldom ſeen, that good men are ſo wiſe for the concernments of their ſouls, and of religion, as many worldly men are for their worldly intereſts.

In ſpeaking to this propoſition, I ſhall do theſe three things:

Firſt, Confirm and illuſtrate the truth of it, by conſidering the ſeveral parts and properties of wiſdom.

Secondly, Give ſome probable account of this, by conſidering what advantages *the children of this world* have above *the children of light.*

Thirdly, I ſhall draw ſome inferences from the whole, by way of application.

Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to confirm and illuſtrate the truth of this, by conſidering the ſeveral parts and properties of wiſdom. Now this is wiſdom, to mind and regard our chief end, and by all means to promote it; and this regard to our chief end doth expreſs itſelf chiefly in theſe particulars; in our being firmly fixed and reſolved upon it; in chooſing the fitteſt means for the compaſſing and accompliſhing of it; in a diligent uſe of thoſe means; in an invincible conſtancy and perſeverance in the proſecution of it; and in making all things to ſubmit and ſtoop to it. Theſe are the principal parts and properties of wiſdom; and I ſhall ſhew that in all theſe *the children of this world* do uſually excell the *children of light.*

1*ſt,* They are uſually more firmly fixed and reſolved upon their end. Whatever they ſet up for their end, riches, or honours, or pleaſures, they are fixed upon it, and ſteady in the proſecution of it. If they ſet up for riches or honours, they neglect and deſpiſe

deſpiſe pleaſure, if it croſs either of thoſe ends. And this fixed reſolution of the end is the great ſpring of action, and that which inſpires men with vigour and diligence in the uſe of means; and the more reſolved men are upon the end, the more active and induſtrious they will be in the uſe of means; for the end governs the means, and gives law and meaſure to our activity and induſtry in the uſe of them, and ſweetens and allays the trouble and difficulty of them.

So that where the end is once firmly fixed and reſolved upon, there will not be wanting fervour of proſecution; but if we be wavering and unſteady as to our end, this will weaken our hands, and quench the heat of our endeavours, and abate the eagerneſs of our purſuit, and according to the degree of it, will derive a debility and inconſtancy into all our motions. *The double-minded man* (as St. James ſays) *is unſtable in all his ways.* Now *the children of this world* are commonly more fixed and reſolved upon their end, than *the children of light.* It is rare to ſee the whole life and actions of a good man, ſo conſtantly and uniformly conſpiring to the furtherance of his great end, ſo directly tending to the ſalvation of his ſoul, and the increaſe of his glory and happineſs in another world, as the actions of a worldly man, and the whole courſe of his life do to the advancing of his worldly intereſts. The covetous or ambitious men ſeldom do any thing to the beſt of their knowledge that is impertinent to their end, much leſs contrary to it; through every thing that they do, one may plainly ſee the end they aim at, and that they are always true to it: Whereas the beſt men do many things which are plainly croſs and contrary to their end, and a great many more which have no relation to it; and when they mind it, it is rather by fits and ſtarts, than in any even courſe and tenor of actions.

And of this we have a famous inſtance in that worldly and ſecular church, which now for ſeveral hundred of years hath more ſteadily purſued

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the end of ſecular greatneſs and dominion, than any other church hath done the ends of true religion, the glory of God, and the ſalvation of the ſouls of men; ſo that there is hardly any doctrine or practice peculiar to that church, and differing from our common Chriſtianity, but it hath a direct and viſible tendency to the promoting of ſome worldly intereſt or other. For inſtance, why do they deny the people the holy ſcriptures, and the ſervice of God in a language which they can underſtand; but that by keeping them in ignorance, they may have them in more perfect ſlavery and ſubjection to them? Why do they forbid their Prieſts to marry, but that they may have no intereſt diſtinct from that of their church, and leave all to it when they dy? To what end is auricular confeſſion, but to keep people in awe, by the knowledge of their ſecrets? Why muſt the laity only receive the ſacrament in one kind, but to draw a greater reverence to the Prieſt, whoſe privilege it ſhall be to receive in both? And why is the intention of the Prieſt neceſſary to the efficacy of the ſacraments, but to perſuade the people, that notwithſtanding the gracious intention of God toward mankind, they cannot be ſaved without the good-will of the Prieſt? The doctrines of purgatory and indulgences, are a plain device to make their markets of the ſins and ſouls of men. I might inſtance in a hundred things more in that church which are of the ſame tendency. This St. John foretold ſhould be the character of the ſpirit of Antichriſt, that it ſhould be a worldly ſpirit, and the doctrines of it ſhould ſerve a ſecular intereſt and deſign, 1 John iv. 5. *They are of the world, and they ſpeak from the world, and the world hears them.* What church is there in the world ſo true throughout to the intereſt of religion, as this worldly church hath been to its own ſecular power and greatneſs?

2*dly*, *The children of this world* are wiſer in the choice of means in order to their end; and this is a great part of wiſdom. For ſome means will bring about an end with leſs pains and difficulty, and expence of time than others. And the men of the world

world are very ingenious in diſcerning the fitneſs and force of means to their ſeveral ends. To what a certainty have men reduced all the ways and arts of gain, and growing rich, and of riſing to honour and preferment? What long trains will men lay to bring about their deſired end? What ſubtle methods have men deviſed, to inſinuate themſelves into court; and when they are there, to plant themſelves in the eye of their Prince, and in the ſunſhine of his favour? and then they have as many ways of worming others out, as of ſcrewing themſelves in.

But in the concernments of our ſouls, and the affairs of another world, how dull and injudicious are we! And how aukwardly and untowardly do we apply means to ends, as if men were *only wiſe to do evil, but to do good had no underſtanding*, as the Prophet complains! By what incongruous and irregular means do many (who would ſeem to be, and ſometimes perhaps are, very zealous in religion) endeavour (as they think) to promote God's glory, by pious frauds and counterfeit miracles, and telling officious lies for God? What a compaſs do many men fetch to go to heaven, by innumerable devices of will-worſhip, by voluntary ſeverities, neither pleaſing to God, nor profitable to men? By tedious pilgrimages and ſenſeleſs ceremonies, and innumerable little external obſervances, of no virtue or efficacy in religion; and by wandering through a wilderneſs of opinions, and the buſhes and brakes of unprofitable queſtions, and controverſies? whereas the way to heaven lies plain and ſtraight before us, conſiſting in ſimplicity of belief, and in holineſs and innocency of life. Not but that there are great differences in the church of Rome between the ſecular Prieſts and the regular, between the Janſeniſts and the Jeſuits; but they ſtill unite in a common intereſt, and are ſubject to Antichriſt their common head. They do not ſeparate from one another, and excommunicate one another, and declare againſt one another, that they are not of the true church. *Satan never caſts out Satan*; and though he loves diviſi-

diviſions among Chriſtians, yet he always takes care, that *his own kingdom be not divided againſt itſelf*, ſo as to endanger the ruin of it. And whenever they have any hopeful deſign for the extirpation of Proteſtants, they can lay aſide their enmities, and be reconciled in ſuch a deſign. Then the Pope and the Kings of the earth *take counſel together*, and like Herod and Pilate, when Chriſt was to be crucified, can be made friends at a day's warning. Whereas the diviſions of the true church are pernicious to it, and, as we ſee at this day among ourſelves, our ſenſeleſs differences and wild heats on both ſides, do contribute to the ſetting up of Popery, and the ruin of the reformed religion; and yet no perſuaſion, no experience can make us wiſer.

3*dly*, *The children of this world* are commonly more diligent in the uſe of means for the obtaining of their end; they will ſweat and toil, and take any pains, *riſe up early, and ly down late, and eat the bread of careſulneſs*; their thoughts are continually running upon their buſineſs, and they catch at every opportunity of promoting it; they will pinch nature and haraſs it; and rob themſelves of their reſt, and all the comfort of their lives, to raiſe their fortune and eſtate. What drudges were Cæſar and Alexander in the way of fame and ambition? How did they tire themſelves and others with long and tedious marches? To what incoveniencies and dangers did they expoſe themſelves and thouſands more? What havock and deſtruction did they make in the world, that they might gain to themſelves the empty title of conquerors of it? When the men of the world engage in any deſign, how intent are they upon it? and with what vigour do they proſecute it? They do not counterfeit a diligence, and ſeem to be more ſerious and induſtrious than in truth they are; they are rather hypocrites the other way, and would conceal their covetouſneſs and ambition, and not ſeem to aſpire after riches and honours ſo much as indeed they do.

But in the purſuit of better things, how cold and remiſs are we? With what a careleſs indifference do moſt men mind their ſouls? How negligent and formal, and many times hypocritical are they in the ſervice of God, and the exerciſe of religion? With what a pitiful courage, and with what faint ſpirits do they reſiſt ſin, and encounter the temptations of it? and how often, and how eaſily are they foiled and baffled by them!

4thly, The men of the world are more invincibly conſtant and pertinacious in the purſuit of earthly things; they are not to be bribed or taken off by favour or fair words; not to be daunted by difficulties, or daſht out of countenance by the frowns and reproaches of men. Offer an ambitious man any thing ſhort of his end and aim, to take him off from the proſecution of it, he ſcorns the motion, and thinks you go about to fool him out of his intereſt. Bait a covetous man with temptations of pleaſure, to get his money from him, how generouſly will this mean-ſpirited man trample upon pleaſure, when it would tempt him from his deſign of being rich?

Difficulties do not daunt them, but whet their courage, and quicken their endeavours, and ſet a keener age upon their ſpirits. Give an ambitious man almoſt a demonſtration of the impoſſibility of his attempts: *contrà audentior ibit*, he will go on ſo much the more boldly and reſolutely. In the ways of religion men are apt to be diſcouraged, and put out of countenance by contempt and reproach; but a covetous man is not to be jeered and flurted out of his money and eſtate; he can be content to be rich, and give leave to thoſe that are not ſo, to laugh at him.

Populus mihi ſibilat, at mihi plaudo.

The rich worldling can hug himſelf in his bags, when the world hiſſeth at him; he can bear *to be hated and perſecuted, and have all manner of evil ſpoke againſt him for money ſake:* And in the purſuits

ſuits of theſe deſigns, men will with great reſolution encounter enmity and oppoſition, and endure great ſufferings and perſecution. How many have been martyrs to their luſts, and have ſacrificed their eaſe and health, and even their lives, in the proſecution of their ambitious, and covetous, and voluptuous deſigns!

But, on the other hand, how eaſily are men checked and diverted from a good courſe, by the temptations and advantages of this world; how many are cold in their zeal for religion, by the favour and friendſhip of this world? And as their goods and eſtates have grown greater, their devotion hath grown leſs. How apt are they to be terrified at the apprehenſion of danger and ſufferings; and by their fearful imaginations, to make them greater than they are, and with the people of Iſrael, to be diſheartened from all further attempts of entering *into the land of promiſe*, becauſe it is *full of giants, and the ſons of Anak?* How eaſily was Peter frighted into the denial of his Maſter? And when our Saviour was apprehended, how did his diſciples forſake him, and fly from him? And though they were conſtant afterwards to the death, yet it was a great while before they were perfectly armed and ſteeled againſt the fear of ſuffering.

5*thly*, The men of the world will make all things ſtoop and ſubmit to that which is their great end and deſign; their end rules them and governs them, and gives laws to all their actions; they will make an advantage of every thing, and if it will not ſerve their end one way or other, they will have nothing to do with it. If an ambitious man ſeek wealth, it is but in order to his deſign to purchaſe friends, and ſtrengthen his intereſt, and to make his riſing the eaſier; he will lay his whole eſtate at the ſtake, rather than miſs of his end. The covetous man will quit his pleaſure, when it lies croſs to his intereſt; if he have any expenſive luſt and chargeable vice, he will turn it off, or exchange it for ſome more frugal and profitable ſin.

But in the affairs of religion, and the concernments of our ſouls, how frequently do men act without a due regard and conſideration of their great end? And inſtead of making other things ſubmit to it, they often bow and bend it to their inferior intereſt. They make heaven ſtoop to earth, and religion to ſerve a worldly deſign; and the glory of God to give way to gain, and the great concernments of their ſouls, and their eternal ſalvation, to their temporal profit and advantage. The men of the world are generally true to their great end, and pay it that reſpect which is due to it, and will ſuffer nothing to take place of it in their eſteem and affection: and if men were as wiſe for their ſouls and for another world, they would bring all things to their great end, and make all the concernments of this temporal life to yield and give way to the great concernments of their eternal happineſs. I proceed in the

Second place, to give ſome account of this, whence it comes to paſs, that *the children of this world are wiſer in their generation than the children of light.* And this I ſhall do, by conſidering what advantages *the children of this world* have as to the affairs of this world, above what good men have as to the concernments of another world. I ſhall inſtance in four or five of the chief.

1ſt, The things of this world are preſent and ſenſible, and becauſe of their nearneſs to us, are apt to ſtrike powerfully upon our ſenſes, and to affect mightily to excite our deſires after them, and to work ſtrongly upon our hopes and fears; but the things of another world being remote from us, are leſſened by their diſtance, and conſequently are not apt to work ſo powerfully upon our minds. They are inviſible to us, and only diſcerned by faith, which is a more obſcure and leſs certain perception of things, than we have of thoſe objects which are preſented to our bodily eyes. *The things which God hath prepared for them that love him*, the glory and happineſs of the next world, are *things which eye hath not ſeen, nor*

nor ear heard. The children of light do not ſee God, as *the children of this world* ſee mammon.

2*dly*, The ſenſual delights and enjoyments of this world, are better ſuited and more agreeable to the corrupt and degenerate nature of men, than ſpiritual and heavenly things are to thoſe that are regenerate. In this lapſed and degenerate ſtate of mankind, appetite and ſenſe are apt to prevail above reaſon; and therefore thoſe things which are moſt delightful to ſenſe, we favour and mind, and love to buſy ourſelves about them, becauſe they are moſt ſuitable to the animal life, which is the governing principle of corrupt nature.

And the reaſon of this is plain, becauſe that principle in worldly and ſenſual men, which purſues earthly things, is in thoſe who are unregenerate entire and undivided, and conſequently the affections and inclinations of the whole man, do all tend one way, and run out towards thoſe things in a full and undivided ſtream; whereas good men are but regenerate in part; and though they have a principle of ſpiritual life in them, yet their affections are divided, and there is a great ſtruggling and conflict between fleſh and ſpirit, and it is a great while before the ſpiritual principle doth clearly prevail, and get a perfect victory over our ſenſual appetites and inclinations. Mens affections to the world are entire and unbroken, and therefore they purſue theſe things with all their might; but the beſt men are but good in part, and that heavenly principle which is in them, is very much hindered in its operations by a contrary principle, our earthly and ſenſual inclinations, which are hardly ever perfectly ſubdued and brought under in this world.

3*dly*, The worldly man's faith and hope, and fear of preſent and ſenſible things, is commonly ſtronger than a good man's faith and hope, and fear of things future and eternal. Now, faith, and hope, and fear, are the great principles which govern and bear ſway in the actions and lives of men. If a man be once firmly perſuaded of the reality of a thing, and that it is good for him, and poſſeſſed with good

hopes of obtaining it, and great fears and apprehenſions of the danger of miſſing it, this man may almoſt be put upon any thing. The merchant trafficks, and the husbandman plows and ſows in faith and hope, becauſe he is convinced that bread is neceſſary to the ſupport of life, and hopes that God will ſo bleſs his labours, that he ſhall reap the fruit of them, and plainly ſees, that if he do not take this pains, he muſt ſtarve. But how few are there that believe, and hope, and fear concerning the things of another world, as the *children of this world* do concerning the things of this world! If any man ask me, how I know this; I appeal to experience; it is plain and viſible in the lives, and actions, and endeavours of men. Good men are ſeldom ſo effectually and throughly perſuaded of the principles of religion, and the truth of the ſayings contained in the holy ſcriptures, as the men of the world are of their own ſayings and proverbs. Men do not believe that *honeſty is the beſt policy*; or, as Solomon expreſſeth it, that *he that walketh uprighly, walketh ſurely*; as the men of the world believe their own maxims, that *a man may be too honeſt to live*: that *plain dealing is a jewel*; *but he that wears it, ſhall dy a beggar*. Few mens hopes of heaven are ſo powerful and vigorous, and have ſo ſenſible an effect upon their lives, as the worldly man's hopes of gain and advantage. Men are not ſo afraid to ſwear, as they are to ſpeak treaſon; they are not ſo firmly perſuaded of the danger of ſin to their ſouls and bodies in another world, as of the danger to which ſome crimes againſt the laws of men do expoſe their temporal lives and ſafety; therefore they will many times venture to offend God rather than incur the penalty of human laws.

4*thly*, The men of the world have but one deſign, and are wholly intent upon it, and this is a great advantage. He that hath but one thing to mind, may eaſily be skilled and excel in it. When a man makes one thing his whole buſineſs, no wonder if he be very knowing and wiſe in that. Now the men of the world mind worldly things, and have no care

and

and concernment for any thing else. It is a saying, I think of Thomas Aquinas, *Cave ab illo qui unicum legit librum :* "He is a dangerous man that "reads but one book;" he that gives his mind but to one thing, must needs be too hard for any man at that. Application to one thing, especially in matters of practice, gains a man perfect experience in it, and experience furnisheth him with observations about it, and these make him wise and prudent in that thing.

But good men, though they have a great affection for heaven and heavenly things, yet the business and necessities of this life, do very much divert and take them off from the care of better things; they are divided between the concernments of this life and the other, and though there be but *one thing necessary* in comparison, yet the conveniencies of this life are to be regarded; and though our souls be our main care, yet some consideration must be had of our bodies, that they may be fit for the service of our souls; some provision must be made for their present support, so long as we continue in these earthly tabernacles; and this will necessarily engage us in the world, so that we cannot always and wholly apply ourselves to heavenly things, and mind them as the men of the world do the things of this world.

5*thly*, and *lastly*, The men of the world have a greater compass and liberty in the pursuit of their worldly designs, than good men have in the prosecution of their interests. The *children of light* are limited and confined to the use of lawful means, for the compassing of their ends; but the men of the world are not so strait-laced, *quocunque modo rem*; they are resolved upon the point, and will stick at no means to compass their end. They do not stand upon the nice distinctions of good and evil, of right and wrong, invented by speculative and scrupulous men, to puzzle business, and to hinder and disappoint great designs. If Ahab have a mind to Naboth's vineyard, and Naboth will not let him be honest and have it for a valuable consideration, he will try to get it a cheaper way: Naboth shall by false witness be made a traitor, and his vineyard by this means

shall

ſhall be forfeited to him. And thus the unjuſt ſteward in the parable provided for himſelf; he wronged his Lord, to ſecure a retreat to himſelf in the time of his diſtreſs.

The third and laſt thing only remains, to make ſome inferences from what hath been ſaid by way of application. And,

I. Notwithſtanding the commendation which hath been given of the wiſdom of this world, yet upon the whole matter it is not much to be valued and admired. It is indeed great in its way and kind; but it is applied to little and low purpoſes, employed about the concernments of a ſhort time and a few days, about the worſt and meaneſt part of ourſelves, and accompanied with the neglect of greater and better things, ſuch as concern our ſouls, and our whole duration, even our happineſs to all eternity. And therefore that which the world admires and cries up for wiſdom, is, in the eſteem of God, who judgeth of things according to truth, but vanity and folly. *The wiſdom of the world* (ſaith St. Paul) *is fooliſhneſs with God.* The rich man in the parable, who increaſed his goods, and enlarged his barns, and laid up for many years, did applaud himſelf, and was, no doubt, applauded by others for a very wiſe man: but becauſe *he laid up treaſure for himſelf, and was not rich toward God*, that is, did not employ his eſtate to good and charitable purpoſes, therefore God, who calls no body out of his right name, calls this man *fool; thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be taken from thee, and then whoſe ſhall all theſe things be?* And our Saviour here in the text, while he commends the wiſdom of *the children of this world*, he adds that which is a conſiderable blemiſh and abatement to it, *The children of this world are wiſer, εἰς τὴν γενεὰν, τὴν ἑαυτῶν, for their age*, for the concernments of this preſent life; but this is but a ſhort and purblind wiſdom, which ſees but a little way, and conſiders only things preſent and near at hand; whereas true wiſdom hath a larger and farther proſpect, and regards the future as well as the preſent, and takes care to provide for it. Nay, our Saviour gives

gives the wiſdom of this world its utmoſt due, when he ſays, *The children of this world are wiſer for their generation*; for this is the very beſt that can be ſaid of it, it ſeldom looks ſo far, and holds out ſo long. Many men have ſurvived their own projects, and have lived to ſee the folly and ill fate of their covetous and ambitious deſigns. So the Prophet tells us, Jer. xvii. 11. *As the partridge ſitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; ſo he that getteth riches, and not by right, ſhall leave them in the midſt of his days, and at his end ſhall be a fool.*

This is wiſdom, to regard our main intereſt; but if we be wrong in our end, (as all worldly men are) the faſter and farther we go, the more fatal is our error and miſtake. *The children of this world* are out in their end, and miſtaken in the main; they are wiſe for this world, which is inconſiderable to eternity; wiſe for a little while, and fools for ever.

2*dly*, From what hath been ſaid, we may infer, that if we loſe our ſouls, and come ſhort of eternal happineſs, it is through our own fault and groſs neglect; for we ſee that men are wiſe enough for this world; and the ſame prudence, and care and diligence applied to the concernments of our ſouls, would infallibly make us happy. Nay, our Saviour here in the text tells us, that uſually leſs wiſdom and induſtry than the men of this world uſe about the things of this world, is exerciſed by *the children of light*, who yet at laſt, through the mercy of God, do attain eternal life.

So that it is very plain, that if men would but take that care for their immortal ſouls, which they generally do for their frail and dying bodies, and be as heartily concerned for the unſeen world, and for eternity, as they are for things viſible and temporal, they would with much more certainty gain heaven, than any man can obtain worldly riches and honours. And can we in conſcience deſire more than to be happy for ever, upon as eaſy and upon more certain terms than any man can be rich or great in this world? For we may miſs of theſe things after all our travel and pains about them; or if we get them,

them, we may loſe them again: But if we *ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*; if we be ſincerely good, we are ſure to have the reward of it, even that *eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed*; if we *lay up for ourſelves treaſures in heaven*, they will be ſafe and ſecure there, where *no moth can corrupt, nor thieves break through and ſteal.*

If we would ſeriouſly think of the other world, and were thoroughly poſſeſt with a firm belief of the eternity of that happineſs or miſery, which remains for men after this life, we ſhould pray to God, and hear his word, and perform all the duties of religion with the ſame care and concernment, with the ſame fervour and intention of mind, as men proſecute their worldly buſineſs. Were we fully perſuaded of the unſeen glories and torments of the other world, we ſhould be much more affected with them, than with all the temptations and terrors of ſenſe; becauſe in reaſon they are much more conſiderable. The diſgrace of the pillory will fright men from perjury; and will not everlaſting ſhame and confuſion? The fear of death will deter many men from robbing and ſtealing, who would perhaps venture upon theſe crimes, if there were no danger in them; and will not the horrors of the ſecond death, of the *worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched*, have as great an awe and influence upon us? If they have not, it is a ſign that we do not equally believe the danger of human laws, and the damnation of hell.

Surely men have not the ſame belief of heaven, and affection for it, that they have for this world. If they had, their care and diligence about theſe things would be more equal. For we are not ſo weak as we make ourſelves: we are not yet ſo degenerate, but if we would ſet ourſelves ſeriouſly to it, and earneſtly beg the aſſiſtance of God's grace, we might come to know our duty, and our wills might be engaged to follow the directions of our underſtandings, and our affections to obey the command of our wills, and our actions to follow the impulſe of

our

our affections. Much of this is naturally in our power; and what is wanting, the grace of God is ready to ſupply. We can go to the church, and we can hear the word of God, and we can conſider what we hear; we can pray to God, and ſay, *we believe, Lord help our unbelief*, and enable us to do what thou requireſt of us; and we can forbear a great many ſins which we raſhly and wilfully run into: A great preſent danger will fright us from ſin, a terrible ſtorm will drive us to our devotion, and teach us to pray; a ſharp fit of the gout will take a man off from drinking; the eye of a maſter or magiſtrate will reſtrain men from many things, which they ſay they cannot forbear. So that we do but counterfeit, and make ourſelves more cripples than we are, that we may be pitied: for if fear will reſtrain us, it is a ſign that we can forbear; if *the rod of affliction will fetch it out* of us, and make us do that which at other times we ſay we are unable to do; this is a demonſtration that it is in us, and that the thing is in our power.

It is true, we can do nothing that is good without the aſſiſtance of God's grace; but that aſſiſtance, which we may have for the asking, is in effect in our own power. So that if the matter were ſearched to the bottom, it is not want of power that hinders us from doing our duty, but ſloth and negligence; for God hath *given us exceeding great and precious promiſes, whereby we may be made partakers of a divine nature*; and by virtue whereof, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, we may *cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear of God.*

3*dly*, and *laſtly*, What a ſhame and reproach is this to the children of light! Our Saviour ſpeaks this by way of upbraiding, as we may judge by the terms of compariſon which he uſeth, that *the children of this world* ſhould be wiſer *than the children of light*, that is, than *wiſdom's own children*; and that they ſhould be *wiſer in their generation*, that is, for the concernments of a ſhort and inconſiderable time, than the others are for all eternity.

How

How ſhould it make our blood to riſe in our faces, and fill us with confuſion, that the men of this world ſhould be more prudent and skilful in the contrivance and management of their little affairs; more reſolute and vigorous in the proſecution of them, than we are about the everlaſting concernments of our ſouls! That a worldly church ſhould uſe wiſer and more effectual means to promote and uphold ignorance, and error, and ſuperſtition, than we do to build up the true church of Chriſt in knowledge, and faith and charity! That the men of the world ſhould toil and take more pains for *the deceitful riches*, than we do for *the true*; and be contented to hazard more for *a corruptible crown*, than we for *an incorruptible!* That they ſhould love pleaſure more than we do God, and mind their bodies and temporal eſtates more than we do our ſouls and our eternal happineſs!

Do but obſerve the men of the world, what a pace they go, what large and nimble ſteps they take in the purſuit of earthly things; they do not ſeek riches as if they ſought them not, and love the world as if they loved it not; and enjoy the preſent delights of this world, as if they poſſeſſed them not; though the faſhion of this world paſſeth away: but we ſeek heaven as if we ſought it not, and love God, as if we loved him not, and mind eternity and the world to come, as if we minded them not; and yet the faſhion of that world doth not paſs away.

But to all this it may be ſaid, you have already told us, that the children of this world have ſo many advantages above the children of light, that it is no wonder if they excel and outſtrip them: And it is very true, that in many reſpects they have the advantage of them. But if the children of light would look about them, and take all things into conſideration, they might ſee ſomething very conſiderable to balance the advantages on the other ſide. It is true, the things of this world are preſent and ſenſible; but ſo long as we have ſufficient aſſurance of the reality of a future ſtate, and of the rewards and puniſhments of it, the greatneſs and eternity of theſe is ſuch

ſuch an amazing conſideration, that no diſtance can render them inconſiderable to a prudent and thinking man. And though the men of the world have an entire principle which is not divided between God and the world; whereas in good men there is a great conflict of contrary principles, the fleſh and ſpirit: yet this diſadvantage is likewiſe balanced by that powerful aſſiſtance of God's grace, which is promiſed to all good men, who heartily beg it of him, and are ſincerely reſolved to make uſe of it. And, *laſtly*, though the men of the world have many ways to compaſs their ends, yet the children of light have one great and infallible one. All the means which the men of the world uſe to accompliſh their deſigns, may fail and miſcarry; for *the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong; nor yet bread to the wiſe, nor riches to men of underſtanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to all*: but he that ſincerely ſerves God, and uſeth the means for the attaining of everlaſting ſalvation, is ſure to attain it; if we ſeek the righteouſneſs of God as we ought, we ſhall certainly be admitted into his kingdom. And this ſurely is an unſpeakable advantage, which the children of light have above the chidren of this world, that if we faithfully uſe the means, we cannot fail of the end; *if we have our fruit unto holineſs, our end ſhall be everlaſting life*; which God of his infinite goodneſs grant to us all, for his mercies ſake.

SERMON CXXX.

Concerning the perfection of God.

MATTH. v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

THESE words are the concluſion which our Saviour draws from thoſe precepts of greater perfection, than any laws that were extant in the world before, ver. 44. *I ſay unto you, love your enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for thoſe that deſpitefully uſe you and perſecute you.* And to perſuade them hereto, he propounds to them the pattern of the divine perfection; telling them, that being thus affected towards their enemies, they ſhould reſemble God, ver. 45. *That ye may be the children of your heavenly Father; for he maketh the ſun to riſe on the evil, and on the good; and ſendeth rain on the juſt, and on the unjuſt.*

And then he tells us, that if we be not thus affected towards our enemies, and thoſe that have been injurious to us, we are ſo far from being like God, that we are but juſt level with the worſt of men, ver. 46, 47. *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you; do not even the publicans the ſame? And if ye ſalute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans ſo?* And then concludes, that if we would attain that perfection which the Chriſtian religion deſigns to advance men to, we muſt endeavour to be like God in theſe perfections of goodneſs and mercy, and patience; *Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* In which words we have,

Firſt,

First, The abſolute perfection of the divine nature ſuppoſed: *As your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Secondly, It is propounded as a pattern to our imitation: *Be ye therefore perfect*, &c.

In handling of theſe words I ſhall do theſe four things:

I. Conſider how we are to conceive of the *divine perfection.*

II. I ſhall lay down ſome rules whereby we may govern and rectify our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of God.

III. How far we are to imitate the perfections of God, and particularly what thoſe divine qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more eſpecially propound to our imitation.

IV. I ſhall endeavour to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to ſhew that the duty here intended by our Saviour is not impoſſible to us; and then conclude this diſcourſe with ſome uſeful inferences from the whole.

I. I ſhall conſider how we are to conceive of the *divine perfections*: Theſe two ways:

1. By aſcribing all imaginable and poſſible perfection to God.

2. By ſeparating and removing all manner of imperfection from him.

1. By aſcribing all imaginable and poſſible perfection to God; abſolute and univerſal perfection, not limited to a certain kind, or to certain particulars; but whatever we can conceive and imagine to be a perfection, is to be aſcribed to him; yea, and beyond this, whatever poſſible perfection there is, or poſſible degree of any perfection, which our ſhort underſtandings cannot conceive or comprehend, is to be aſcribed to him. For we are not to confine the perfection of God to our imagination, as if we could find out the Almighty to perfection: But on the contrary, to believe the perfection of the divine nature to be boundleſs and unlimited, and infinitely to exceed our higheſt thoughts and apprehenſions.

More particularly, all kinds and degrees of perfection are to be aſcribed to God, which either do not imply a plain contradiction, or do not argue ſome imperfection, or are not evidently inconſiſtent with ſome other and greater perfection.

Some things may ſeem to be perfections, which in truth are not, becauſe they are plainly impoſſible, and involve a contradiction: as that what has once been, ſhould by any power be made not to have been; or that any thing, which by its nature is limited and confined to one place, ſhould at the ſame time be in another. Theſe things in reaſon are impoſſible, and therefore not to be ſuppoſed to fall under any power how unlimited ſoever. For if we once aſcribe contradictions to God, we deſtroy his being; becauſe then to be, and not to be, power, and no power, would be all one.

And then there are ſome perfections, which do argue and ſuppoſe imperfections in them; as motion, the quickneſs and ſwiftneſs whereof in creatures is a perfection, but then it ſuppoſeth a finite and limited nature: For a boundleſs and immenſe being, that is every where preſent at once, hath no need to move from one place to another; and therefore, though motion be a perfection in creatures, there is no reaſon to aſcribe it to God, becauſe it ſuppoſeth a greater imperfection.

And there are alſo ſome imaginable degrees of perfection, which, becauſe they are inconſiſtent with other perfections, are not to be admitted in the divine nature. For inſtance, ſuch degrees of goodneſs and mercy may be imagined, as would quite exclude and ſhut out juſtice; and on the other hand, ſuch a ſtrictneſs and a rigor of juſtice, as would leave no room at all for patience and mercy; and therefore ſuch degrees are not really to be eſteemed perfections. For this is a certain truth, that nothing is a divine perfection, which evidently claſheth with any other neceſſary and eſſential perfection of the divine nature. We muſt ſo conſider the perfections of God, that they may accord and conſiſt together; and therefore it cannot be a perfection

fection of God to be ſo good and gracious as to encourage ſin, and to overthrow the reverence of his own laws and government. It is not goodneſs, but eaſineſs and weakneſs, to be contented to be perpetually injured and affronted. It is not patience to be willing to be everlaſtingly trampled upon. So likewiſe on the other hand, it is not a perfection to be ſo severe and rigorous, as to ſmite a ſinner in the inſtant that he offends, not to be able to refrain from puniſhment, and to give time for repentance.

But whatever perfection is conceivable or poſſible, and argues no imperfection, nor is repugnant to any other neceſſary perfection, is to be aſcribed to God; for this is the moſt natural and eaſy conception that we can have of God, that he is the moſt perfect being. This natural light doth firſt ſuggeſt and offer to the minds of men, and we cannot conceive of God as mere power and will, without wiſdom and goodneſs. Hence it is that the Greeks call God very often τὸ Κρεῖττον, *the beſt of beings:* and the Latin, *Optimus Maximus, the beſt and the greateſt; beatiſſima & perfectiſſima naturæ, conſtans & perfecta ratio, the happieſt and moſt perfect nature, immutable and abſolute reaſon*; and many other ſuch expreſſions which we meet with in the writings of the heathen Philoſophers. I readily grant, that the firſt and moſt obvious thought which men have of God, is that of his greatneſs and majeſty; but this neceſſarily involves or infers his goodneſs; as Seneca excellently reaſons, *Primus deorum cultus eſt deos credere, dein reddere illis majeſtatem ſuam, reddere bonitatem, ſine qua nulla majeſtas*; "The firſt "worſhip of the gods, is to believe their being, "next to aſcribe to them greatneſs and majeſty, to "aſcribe to them goodneſs, without which there can "be no majeſty."

And we ſhall find all along in Plato and Tully, and the beſt and wiſeſt writers among the Heathen, that they every where attribute the higheſt excellencies and perfections to the divine nature, and do ſteer and govern all their diſcourſes of God by this prin-

ciple, that perfection is to be aſcribed to him: And whenever any thing is ſaid of God, they examine whether it be a perfection or not; if it be, they give it him as his due; if it be not, they lay it aſide, as a thing not fit to be ſpoken of him.

And in the ſcripture we do every where find perfection aſcribed to the nature and works and laws of God, to every thing that belongs to him, or proceeds from him. Job xxxvii. 16. *Doſt thou know the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?* And again, *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God? Canſt thou find the Almighty to perfection?* Pſal. xviii. 30. *As for God his way is perfect.* Pſal. xix. 7. *The law of the Lord is perfect.*

I ſhall not need to conſider particularly the ſeveral perfections of the divine nature; I ſhall only give you a brief ſcheme and draught of them. Whatever perfection can be imagined either in the manner of being or acting, is to be aſcribed to God; therefore, as to his nature, we ſay that he is a ſpirit, that is, that he is not mere body or matter, becauſe that would exclude ſeveral other perfections; for mere matter is incapable both of knowledge and liberty, being determined by neceſſary laws and motions; and yet without knowledge and liberty, there can be no wiſdom nor goodneſs. We ſay of God, that he is of himſelf, and without cauſe, and does not owe his being to any other; and conſequently that he is neceſſarily, and that he cannot but be, and cannot be otherwiſe than he is; for that which is of itſelf, did not chooſe whether it would be or not, nor whether it would be thus or otherwiſe; for to ſuppoſe any thing to deliberate or conſult about its own being, is to ſuppoſe it to be before it is.

We muſt ſay of God likewiſe, that he is immenſe, and every where preſent, becauſe to be limited is an imperfection; and that he is eternal, that is, ever was, and ſhall be; for to ceaſe to be, is a greater imperfection than ſometime not to have been.

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And then we are to ſay of God, that he is the cauſe of all other beings; that they are made by him, and depend upon him; that he knows all things, and can do all things in the moſt perfect manner, by a glance of his mind, and by the mere beck and nod of his will, without long ſtudy or deliberation, without laborious pains and endeavours, and conſequently that nothing is exempted from his knowledge, and power, and providence, and that he adminiſters all things in a way of goodneſs and wiſdom, of juſtice and truth; and therefore all things are to be referred to him, as their laſt end. All theſe perfections, and all other that are poſſible, we are to look upon the divine nature as fully and immutably poſſeſt of, and that in an higher and more excellent degree than our finite underſtandings are able to conceive or comprehend.

2. As we are to aſcribe all imaginable poſſible perfections to God, ſo we are to ſeparate and remove all manner of imperfection from him. We muſt not obſcure or blemiſh the divine nature with the leaſt ſhadow or blot of imperfection. If we once admit of this, to aſcribe any thing to God which argues imperfection, we ſtrike at the foundation, and deſtroy one of the cleareſt and moſt eſſential notions which men have of God. And therefore we find the ſcripture very careful to remove all kinds of natural or moral imperfection from God. Gen. xviii. 25. *That be far from thee to do after this manner, to ſlay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous ſhould be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the judge of all the world do right?* Deut. xxxii. 4. *A God of truth, and without iniquity.* Rom. ix. 14. *What ſhall we ſay then, is there unrighteouſneſs with God? God forbid;* far be it from him.

Hence it is that in ſcripture holineſs is ſo frequently aſcribed to God, which ſignifies the purity and freedom of the divine nature from that which we call ſin; and God is very ſollicitous to give us ſuch a notion of himſelf, as may remove ſin and unrighteouſneſs at the greateſt diſtance from him, becauſe that

that is the greateſt of imperfections. Is it an imperfection to countenance ſin? The ſcripture acquits God of it, Pſal. v. 4, 5. *Thou art not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with thee.* Is it an imperfection to go from one's word, or to change one's mind? This likewiſe is removed from God, 1 Sam. xv. 29. *The ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie or repent: He is not a man, that he ſhould repent.* Is it an imperfection to want any thing, to be liable to any thing, to depend upon any thing without one's ſelf for happineſs? This alſo is to be ſet far from him. Job xxii. 2, 3. *Can a man be profitable to God? Or is it a gain to him, that thou makeſt thy way perfect?* Job xxxv. 6, 7. *If thou ſinneſt, what doſt thou againſt him? Or if thy tranſgreſſions be multiplied, what doſt thou unto him? If thou art righteous, what giveſt thou him, or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedneſs may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteouſneſs may profit the ſon of man.* Is it an imperfection to tempt, or to be tempted to ſin? This is to be ſeparated from God; *He cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man,* ſaith St. James, chap. i. 17. And to mention no more, is it an imperfection to be in any reſpect mutable? This is denied of God. *With him there is no variableneſs, or ſhadow of turning.* Thus you ſee how we are to conceive of the perfections of God, by aſcribing all imaginable and poſſible perfections to him, and removing all ſhadow of imperfection from him. I proceed in the

II. Place, to lay down ſome rules by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of God: The beſt I can think of are theſe following:

Firſt, Let us begin with the moſt natural, and plain, and eaſy perfections of God, and lay them for a foundation, and rectify all our other apprehenſions of God, and reaſonings about him, by theſe; and theſe are his power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, to which moſt of the reſt may be reduced. Right apprehenſions, and a firm belief of theſe will make

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it eaſily credible to us, that all things were made and are governed by him; for his goodneſs will diſpoſe and incline him to communicate being to other things, and to take care of them when they are made. And infinite power and wiſdom render him able to do all this without any labour or difficulty, and without any diſturbance of his eaſe or happineſs, as Epicurus would ſeem vainly to fear; who in truth did not believe a God, but pretended only to deny his providence, and that he either made or governed the world, becauſe he was loth to lay ſo much trouble upon him. Vain man! as if thoſe things which are impoſſible and difficult to our weakneſs and folly, might not be infinitely eaſy to infinite power and wiſdom.

Particularly the goodneſs and juſtice of God are not ſo difficult to apprehend, as the diſputes and controverſies about them have rendered them to many. When we conſider infinite knowledge and power, we may eaſily loſe ourſelves, and go out of our depth, by wading too far into them. There is ſomething concerning theſe, that is unimaginable, and unaccountable to our reaſon; we may not be able to underſtand how ſomething may be produced from nothing, becauſe it argues ſuch an exceſs of power, as we cannot comprehend: but yet we are forced to acknowledge, that either the world muſt be produced from nothing, or that matter was eternally of itſelf, which is every whit as hard to imagine, as that infinite power ſhould be able to produce it from nothing. So likewiſe we are not able to conceive, how God can certainly know future events, which depend upon voluntary and uncertain cauſes, becauſe we cannot comprehend infinite knowledge; but this we may eaſily be ſatisfied in, that infinite power and knowledge may be able to do, and know many things, which we cannot conceive how they can be known or done, no more than a child can imagine how a great Mathematician can demonſtrate his propoſitions. Only this we are ſure of, as we can be of any thing, that no power can do that

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which is evidently impoſſible, and implies a plain contradiction.

We are not able perhaps to reconcile the particular providences of God with his univerſal goodneſs, juſtice and wiſdom; becauſe we cannot ſee to the end of his ways and works at one view, and ſee every part with relation to the whole; which would appear very wiſe, if we knew the whole ſeries of things, and ſaw the entire deſign together, as God himſelf does, to whom (as Solomon tells us) *all his ways are known from the beginning.*

So that however we may be at a loſs in our conceptions of God's infinite knowledge and power, yet goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth, are notions eaſy and familiar; and if we could not underſtand theſe, the whole Bible would be inſignificant to us. For all revelation from God ſuppoſeth us to know what is meant by goodneſs, juſtice and truth: And therefore no man can entertain any notion of God, which plainly contradicts theſe. And it is fooliſh for any man to pretend, that he cannot know what goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth in God are: For if we do not know this, it is all one to us, whether God be good or not: nor could we imitate his goodneſs; for he that imitates, endeavours to make himſelf like ſomething that he knows, and muſt of neceſſity have ſome idea of that to which he aims to be like: So that if we had no certain and ſettled notion of the goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth of God, he would be altogether an uninteNligible being; and religion, which conſiſts in the imitation of him, would be utterly impoſſible.

Now theſe being the moſt eaſy and intelligible perfections of God, by which he is ſaid in ſcripture to declare his name, that is, to make himſelf known to us, we ſhould govern all our reaſonings about God (as concerning his decrees, and his concurrence with the free actions of men, and his particular providence, which are things more dark and obſcure) by what is more clear; and we ſhall find in ſcripture, that in all theſe points holy men do conſtantly appeal to theſe unqueſtionable and intelligible perfections

ctions of God. *Wilt thou deſtroy the righteous with the wicked?* (ſaith Abraham) *that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the world do right?* We may be miſtaken; but God certainly knows who are wicked, and who are righteous; and he knows how to puniſh the wicked, and ſave the righteous: But we cannot be miſtaken in this principle, *that the Judge of all the world will do right.* Thus Moſes ſatisfies himſelf and others concerning the particular providences of God towards the people of Iſrael, Deut. xxxii. 3, 4. *I will publiſh the name of the Lord: All his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, juſt and right is he.* This we certainly know of God. So St. Paul, Rom. ii. 2. *Thou art inexcuſable, O man!* Whatſoever excuſe men may pretend for their faults, he lays down this for a principle, *We are ſure the judgment of God is according to truth.*

Secondly, Let us always conſider the perfections of God in conjunction, and ſo as to reconcile them with one another. Do not conſider God as mere power and ſovereignty, as mere mercy and goodneſs, as mere juſtice and ſeverity; but as all theſe together, and in ſuch a meaſure and degree, as may make them conſiſtent with one another. The greateſt miſtakes in religion are certainly ſprung from this root, from ſeparating the perfections of God, and conſidering them ſingly, and framing ſuch wide and large notions of one as to exclude another; whereas the perfections of God agree together, and that is not a divine perfection which contradicts any other perfection. Among men indeed an eminent degree of any one excellency does uſually ſhut out ſome other; and therefore it is obſerved, that power and moderation, love and diſcretion, do not often meet together; that a great memory and a ſmall judgment, a good wit and an ill nature, are many times found in conjunction. But in infinite perfection all perfections do eminently meet and conſiſt together; and it is not neceſſary that one excellency ſhould be raiſed upon the ruins of another.

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And if this had been well conſidered, men would not, by being too intent upon God's ſovereignty, with neglect of his other perfections, have ſpoken thoſe hard things about predeſtination: for the ſovereignty of God doth by no means ſet him above the eternal laws of goodneſs, and truth, and righteouſneſs. And if this were conſidered, men would not, by poring upon the juſtice and ſeverity of God, be ſo ſwallowed up in deſpair: for God is not ſo ſevere, but he is merciful to the penitent, and hath left a retreat for the returning ſinner. If this were well conſidered, it would check the preſumption of thoſe who encourage themſelves in ſin, by fancying to themſelves a God all of mercy and goodneſs; and *becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not ſpeedily executed, therefore their heart is fully ſet in them to do evil*: For it is not goodneſs and mercy finally to bear with and forgive obſtinate offenders, but want of prudence and good government.

Thirdly, Among different opinions concerning God (as there always have been and will be in the world) chooſe thoſe which are fartheſt from extremity; becauſe truth as well as virtue uſually lies between the extremes. And here I will inſtance in that controverſy, which has much diſquieted the church almoſt in all ages, concerning the decrees of God; about which there are two extremes, the one, that God peremptorily decrees the final condition of every particular perſon, that is, their everlaſting happineſs or miſery, without any regard or conſideration of the good or bad actions of men. The other, that God decrees nothing concerning any particular perſon, but only in general, that men found under ſuch and ſuch qualifications ſhall be happy or miſerable, and puts it into their own power to qualify themſelves. Now he that is doubtful in this matter, as every man muſt be that underſtands the difficulties on both ſides, had beſt take up in the middle opinion, that God decrees the final condition of particular perſons with reſpect to certain qualifications, which ſpeaking abſolutely, are not in every man's power, but yet under the influence of God's grace, which

which is never wanting to the ſincere endeavours of men, may be ſaid to be in our power, in the ſame ſenſe as St. Paul ſays, *I am able to do all things through Chriſt ſtrengthening me:* For beſides that this in all probability is the truth, there will be this advantage in it, that he that ſtands in the middle, is like to be more moderate towards the diſſenters on both ſides, than either of them will be to one another: becauſe the middle is not ſo far from either extreme, as the extremes are from one another: At the worſt, he ſtands faireſt for an impartial enquiry after truth, and when he has ſatisfied himſelf where the truth lies, he may more ſilently paſs over to it, without any great imputation of inconſtancy; which cannot but be remarkable in him who paſſeth from one extreme to another.

Fourthly and *laſtly*, Entertain no opinion concerning God, that doth evidently contradict the practice of religion and a good life, though never ſo ſpecious and ſubtile arguments may be uſed to perſuade it. Truth is moſt eaſily ſeen and diſcerned in thoſe reaſonings and opinions which tend to practice; becauſe the abſurdity and inconvenience of them is ſooneſt diſcovered: whereas we cannot ſo certainly find out the truth or falſhood of thoſe opinions which ſpeculative men deviſe in their ſtudies, without any conſideration whether they ſerve any real purpoſe of life or not. Men indeed are very apt to form thoſe notions, which are moſt remote from common ſenſe and uſe; becauſe more pains and wit are required to make them plauſible: but there needs no other argument to make a wiſe man deſpiſe them than that they are unprofitable, and ſignify nothing to our practice, and to make men truly better.

This is univerſally true in all kind of knowledge, but moſt conſiderable in the knowledge of God and religion; becauſe that knowledge is of the greateſt conſideration. We need not ſcruple to admit ſome things not ſo evident to natural reaſon, if we be ſatisfied of the truth of them from an higher and

more cogent reaſon: As that God has revealed it, and ſaid it; this general reaſon may perſuade us of a thing that is above and beyond natural reaſon: But we may not admit any thing for a divine revelation, which evidently contradicts and weakens the practice of an holy life; becauſe this is the main end of all divine revelation; and we know God, only in order to the ſervice and imitation of him.

Let us then look upon all knowledge that contradicts practice, as vain and falſe, becauſe it deſtroys its end. There are many things that ſeem probable enough in ſpeculation, which yet we moſt pertinaciouſly deny, becauſe they are not practicable; and there are many things which ſeem doubtful in ſpeculation, and would admit of great diſpute, which yet becauſe they are found true in practice and experience, are to be taken for certain and unqueſtionable. The ἀργὸς λόγος, the idle reaſoning of the Stoicks, was a thing contemned by the wiſer Philoſophers, as a vain and uſeleſs ſubtilty. Zeno pretends to demonſtrate there is no motion; and what is the conſequence of this ſpeculation, but that men muſt ſtand ſtill? But ſo long as a man finds he can walk, all the ſophiſtry in the world will not perſuade him that motion is impoſſible. In like manner, they that would perſuade us that men can do nothing, nor contribute any more to their own ſanctification than ſtocks or ſtones, and upon ſcripture-metaphors miſunderſtood, (as *our being dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*, and *created to good works*) graft notions, which are impoſſible and abſurd in practice, do not conſider that the natural conſequence of this is, that men muſt do nothing at all in religion, never think of God, nor pray to him, nor read his word, nor go to church, but ſit ſtill and be wholly paſſive to the operations of God's grace. But however this may ſeem plauſible, and men may think they add much to the glory of God's grace, while they deny any power in the creature; yet every conſiderate man will preſently apprehend, that this is by no means to be admitted, becauſe it

it contradicts practice, and makes all the commands and exhortations of God's word vain and to no purpose, because it destroys religion, and discourages the endeavours of men; makes them slothful and careless of *working out their own salvation*, than which nothing can set a man farther from God's grace and assistance, and more immediately dispose him for ruin: And upon some such false reasoning as this, the *slothful Servant* in the parable *hid his talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth*; but when he was called to account, his excuse was not admitted, but *he was cast into utter darkness*. The two other particulars, namely, how far we are to imitate the divine perfections, and particularly what those divine qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation, and likewise to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here enjoined, *Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*, is not impossible to us: Both these I shall refer to another opportunity.

SERMON CXXXI.

Concerning our imitation of the divine perfections.

MATTH. v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

The second sermon on this text.

IN these words we have, *first*, The absolute perfection of the divine nature supposed, not only in those before-mentioned, of goodness, and mercy, and patience; but in all other excellencies whatsoever.

Secondly, The perfection of God is propounded as a pattern for our imitation.

In the handling of these two particulars, I propounded to proceed in this method:

I. To shew how we are to conceive of the divine perfection.

II. To lay down some rules, by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of God.

III. To shew how far we are to imitate the perfections of God, and particularly what those divine qualities are which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to shew that the duty here intended by our Saviour, is not impossible to us: and then to draw some useful inferences from the whole.

The two first I have already spoken to. I now proceed to the third particular, which is, To shew how far we are to imitate the perfections of God, and particularly what those divine qualities are which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation. For though these words do suppose the absolute perfection of the divine nature, yet because there are several perfections of God, which are incommunicable, and a creature, as such, is utterly incapable of them, these cannot be supposed to be intended for a pattern to us. As the necessity and independency of the divine nature, and the self-sufficiency of it to his own happiness; to be the original cause of all things; and consequently supreme Lord and Governor; the immensity and eternity of his being; these and perhaps several other perfections, are incommunicable to a creature; and it would be an unsufferable pride, and a kind of high treason against the divine Majesty, and a sottish ignorance of the necessary bounds and limits of our own state, as we are creatures, to think to resemble God in these excellencies, of which the condition of a creature is utterly incapable. This was the sin of Lucifer; an ambition to step into the throne of God, and to be like the Most High.

So

So that, in our imitation of the divine perfection, we are to keep within the ſtation of creatures, not affecting an independency and ſovereignty like the Moſt High, and to be omnipotent as he is; *to have an arm like God, and to thunder with a voice like him,* as the expreſſion is in Job; but to endeavour to reſemble him, *pro modulo creaturæ,* according to the rate and capacity of a creature, in thoſe divine qualities, and in ſuch meaſures and degrees, as our finite and dependent nature is capable of.

More eſpecially and chiefly in the moral perfections of the divine nature, ſuch as are his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, his juſtice and truth, and faithfulneſs; theſe, and only theſe, the ſcripture ſeems to comprehend under the name of holineſs; not all the excellencies of the divine nature in general, but thoſe which we call moral excellencies and perfections, ſuch as thoſe which I have named; for with theſe, and hardly with any other, is the holineſs of God joined in ſcripture, as *holy and righteous, holy and true,* &c. And therefore when God ſays, *Be ye holy, for I am holy*; it ſignifies, that we are to imitate God in his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and righteouſneſs, and faithfulneſs, and truth; for theſe are the holineſs of the divine nature, which ſet him at the greateſt diſtance from that which we call moral impurity and ſin.

For that which our Saviour, here in the text, more peculiarly recommends to our imitation, is the goodneſs of God, of which his mercy and patience are two eminent branches. The mercy of God, is his goodneſs to thoſe that are in miſery, or are liable to it. The patience of God, is his mercy in ſparing thoſe who have deſerved puniſhment, and are liable to it. And the goodneſs of God is then greateſt, when it is exerciſed towards the evil and unthankful; thoſe who are ſo far from deſerving it, that they have given great and juſt provocations to the contrary. And this affectionate temper of mind, which is ſo remarkable in God towards the unworthy and unthankful ſons of men, our Saviour recommends to our imita-

tion, here in the text, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Be ye therefore*——This article of inference, *therefore*, hath a plain relation to ſomething ſpoken before; and if we look back to verſe 44. we ſhall find our Saviour there enjoining his diſciples *to love their enemies; to bleſs them that curſe them; to do good to them that hate them; and to pray for thoſe that deſpitefully uſe them, and perſecute them.* And by what other argument doth he inforce the practice of this difficult duty, but by telling us, that this is to be like God, to be good to the evil and unthankful? ver. 45. *That ye may be the children of your heavenly Father, who maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil and the good, and his rain to fall on the juſt and on the unjuſt.* God is good to all, and exerciſeth great mercy and patience even towards the evil and unjuſt. And then he concludes, that if perfection itſelf be fit to be a pattern, we ſhould labour after theſe qualities; *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* So that though the univerſal perfection of the divine nature be here ſuppoſed, yet the attributes of his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, are here particularly pointed at, and propounded to us for our pattern; and the precept of imitating the divine perfection is more eſpecially to be underſtood of thoſe perfections which our Saviour had been diſcourſing of before, *viz.* the goodneſs and mercy of God. And that this is undoubtedly ſo, is evident from St. Luke's rendering this precept, chap. vi. 36. *Be ye therefore οἰκτίρμονες*, benefici, *ready to do good, full of kindneſs and benignity; merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful*; that is, endeavour you to be ſuch as I have deſcribed God to be. And this St. Matthew calls perfection: becauſe the goodneſs of God, is his great perfection; and the glory of the divine nature, that which reflects a luſtre and beauty upon all his other attributes, and takes off the terror of them. From all which it is plain, what thoſe perfections of the divine nature are, which our Saviour doth here particularly

cularly recommend to our imitation. I come now, in the

Fourth and *laſt* place, To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to ſhew, that the duty here required and intended by our Saviour, (when he ſays, *Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*) is not impoſſible to us. And to this purpoſe, be pleaſed to conſider theſe three or four things:

1. That our imitation of God is certainly reſtrained to the communicable perfections of God, and ſuch as creatures are capable of; as I have ſhewn before. For it is ſo far from being a duty to affect or attempt to be like God in his peculiar perfections, that it was, probably, the ſin of the apoſtate Angels.

2. Our imitation of the divine perfections, which are communicable to creatures, is likewiſe to be reſtrained to ſuch degrees of theſe perfections, as creatures are capable of. For no creature can ever be ſo perfectly good as God is; nor partake of any other excellency in that tranſcendent degree, in which the divine nature is poſſeſſed of it.

3. But there is no manner of inconvenience in having a pattern propounded to us of ſo great perfection, as is above our reach to attain to; and there may be great advantages in it. The way to excell in any kind, is, *optima quæque exempla ad imitandum proponere*, to propoſe the higheſt and moſt perfect examples to our imitation. No man can write after too perfect and good a copy; and though he can never reach the perfection of it, yet he is like to learn more, than by one leſs perfect. He that aims at the heavens, which yet he is ſure to come ſhort of, is like to ſhoot higher than he that aims at a mark within his reach.

Beſides, that the excellency of the pattern, as it leaves room for continual improvement, ſo it kindles ambition, and makes men ſtrain and contend to the utmoſt to do better: And though he can never hope to equal the example before him, yet he will endeavour to come as near it as he can. So that a perfect

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pattern is no hinderance, but an advantage rather to our improvement in any kind.

4. If any thing can be ſuppoſed to be our duty, which is abſolutely beyond our power, a precept of this nature may with as much reaſon be ſuppoſed to be ſo, as any thing that can be inſtanced in: becauſe in ſuch a caſe, if we do our beſt, and be continually preſſing forward toward the mark, though we can never reach it, yet we do very commendably; and whatever the law may require to try and raiſe our obedience, yet in all equitable interpretation, ſuch a will and endeavour will be acceptable with God for the deed. For if the perfection of the law do really exceed our ability, and be beyond the poſſibility of our performance, the aſſurance we have of God's goodneſs will ſufficiently ſecure us from any danger and prejudice upon that account. And we may reaſonably preſume, that to do all we can towards the fulfilling of this precept, will be as acceptable to God, and as beneficial to ourſelves, as if our power had been greater, and we had perfectly fulfilled it. If our heavenly Father, to try the readineſs and chearfulneſs of our obedience, bid us do that which he knows we cannot do, though we can do ſomething towards it, we may be ſure that he will be very well pleaſed when he ſees, that in obedience to him we have done all that we could. And we may in this caſe reaſon as our Saviour does; *If we that are evil would deal thus with our children, how much more ſhall our heavenly Father?* The goodneſs of God ſignifies very little, if it does not ſignify this, that in any inſtance of real and unqueſtionable goodneſs, God is much better than any father upon earth.

However at the worſt, that wherein we fall ſhort of the perfection of the law, may be ſupplied on our part, by an humble acknowledgment of our own weakneſs and imperfection; and on God's part, by mercy and forgiveneſs, for the ſake of the perfect obedience of our bleſſed Redeemer. This is the leaſt benefit we can expect in this

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caſe from the grace, and mercy, and equity of the goſpel.

5. And *laſtly*, which will fully clear this matter; this precept doth not oblige us to come up to a perfect equality with the pattern propounded to us, but only imports a vigorous imitation of it; that we be perpetually aſcending and climbing up higher, ſtill advancing from one degree of goodneſs to another, and continually aſpiring after a nearer reſemblance to God: And this certainly is poſſible to us, to endeavour to be as like God as we can, in this weak and imperfect ſtate.

Whereas any equality with God, even in the communicable attributes of his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, is not only impoſſible to us in this ſtate of ſin and imperfection, but above the condition of a creature, even of *the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect*, and of the higheſt Angels in glory; for their perfection is not abſolute, but in compariſon with our preſent ſtate. And I think there is no great reaſon to doubt, but that the bleſſed ſpirits above, who continually behold the face of their Father, are ſtill writing after this copy, which is here propounded to us; and endeavouring *to be perfect, as their Father which is in heaven is perfect*; ſtill aſpiring after a nearer and more perfect reſemblance of God, whoſe goodneſs and mercy is ſo far beyond, and before that of any creature, that they may be for ever approaching nearer to it, and yet never overtake it.

And this ſeems to be no inconſiderable ingredient, and enhancement of the happineſs of heaven, that the holineſs of good men (which is the ſimilitude of God) is never at a ſtand, nor at its full growth and period; but that the glorified ſaints (yea and bleſſed Angels too) may be continually growing and improving, and they themſelves ſtill become better and happier to all eternity. And this in my apprehenſion is no undervaluing the happineſs of heaven, that it is not ſo perfect at firſt, as it ſhall be afterwards; becauſe it is granted on all hands, that the happineſs of thoſe good ſouls,

ſouls, who are already in bliſs, ſhall be more perfect and compleat at the reſurrection. And why may it not then be continually increaſing, and be augmented ſtill more and more, without any ſtint or final period of its perfection? In this world we are apt to faint in a long courſe of goodneſs, and to be *weary of well-doing*. But in the other ſtate, when men ſhall be ſtrongly biaſſed to goodneſs, and have nothing to pull them back, it will then be ſo far from being a trouble, that methinks it ſhould be a mighty pleaſure to the bleſſed, to find that there is no end of their doing good, and becoming better. For if conformity to God be the ground and foundation of all happineſs, then our bleſſedneſs will advance proportionably, as we grow more and more like to him. This, I confeſs, were a diſmal conſideration, to think that in heaven we ſhould be liable to relapſe, to go backward, or fall from that holy and happy ſtate. But this is a comfortable conſideration, that our holineſs and happineſs ſhall never be at a ſtand, that it is ſecure ſo far as it goes, and that we cannot loſe what we have once attained, as we may do in this world. This, methinks, ſhould be a trouble to no man, that as good and happy as he is at firſt, he ſhall ſtill be better and better, more and more happy without end.

But be that as it will, and as God pleaſeth, (for we do but talk in the dark about our future ſtate) this is certain, that an equality with God in any of his perfections, is not to be attained by any creature, and therefore cannot be thought to be the meaning of this precept: But that which our Saviour requires, is a vigorous imitation of this pattern; that we have this example of the divine perfection always before us, and that we be continually endeavouring, as much as in us lies, to bring ourſelves to the neareſt reſemblance of God, that poſſibly we can. And if this be our ſincere care and ſtudy, we need not doubt but that it will find acceptance with God, and that he will be graciouſly pleaſed to eſteem us for his children; and if there need a pardon for it, that God will forgive us wherein we fall ſhort of

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the perfection of that pattern, which we can never imitate to perfection.

And happy were it for us, if this were all the ground of our fear and trouble, that when we had done all we could, we muſt ſtill fall much ſhort of the perfection of God's law, and the duty therein laid upon us. Alas! which of us does near ſo much as we can, and is not conſcious to himſelf that it is through his own fault and neglect, that he is ſo unlike his heavenly Father in goodneſs and mercy, in righteouſneſs and true holineſs; and that he ſtill partakes in ſo great a meaſure of thoſe, not only unreaſonable and brutiſh, but even deviliſh paſſions of malice and hatred, of rage and cruelty, of impatience and implacable revenge; and that theſe ungodlike qualities do ſo frequently prevail upon us and have ſo much dominion over us!

We are ſo far from being what we ought, in theſe and many other reſpects, that we are far from what we might be, if we would mind our duty with care and conſcience, and make it our ſincere endeavour to ſubdue ourſelves to a conformity to God, and to a perfect holineſs in his fear.

Would we but often ſet God before our eyes, and repreſent to ourſeves thoſe excellent and amiable perfections of the divine nature, which are ſo comfortable and beneficial to us, and to which we ſtand ſo infinitely obliged, his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, upon which all our hopes of happineſs do depend, and to which we are indebted that we are not miſerable paſt recovery; that goodneſs and patience, which he continually exerciſeth towards us, (for we provoke him every day,) and exerciſeth towards us, on purpoſe to endear thoſe perfections to us, from which we reap ſo much comfort and advantage; that by the pattern of perfection itſelf, and the example of him who is ſo much above us, no ways obliged to us, nor tied by any intereſt to be concerned for us; and who being happy in himſelf, neither hopes nor fears any thing from us: I ſay, by an example that has all theſe advantages, we might be provoked to be ſo affected to-

towards one another (who have mutual obligations one to another, and mutual expectations of good or evil one from another) as we have always found God to be towards us, and as we desire he should still continue; and miserable creatures are we, whenever he ceaseth to be so: And we have reason to fear he will cease to be so, if this example of his goodness and patience towards us, do not transform us into the image of the divine perfections, and prevail upon us to imitate those excellencies which we have so much reason to approve and admire, and be in love withal.

These considerations, taken both from ingenuity and interest, should awaken our sloth, and stir up our most resolute and vigorous endeavours after that perfection which our Saviour here requires, and make us ashamed of our lazy complaints, that our duty is set so high, that the endeavours of our whole life cannot reach it; when yet we have hardly made one step towards it, and are so remiss and unconcerned about it, as if we could do it at any time with the greatest ease, and, at an hour's warning before we leave the world, could fulfil this precept of our Lord, of *being perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

And yet, let me tell you, so far as any of us are from resembling our heavenly Father in some good degree and measure, so far are we distant from heaven, and the temper of the blessed; so far are we utterly unqualified for the blissful sight and enjoyment of God: for unless we be first *like him*, we cannot *see him as he is:* Only *the pure in heart shall see God*; and therefore *every man that has this hope in him*, should *purify himself even as he is pure.*

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, dispatched the four things I propounded for the explication of this text; namely, how we are to conceive of the divine perfections, and to give some rules to regulate and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of God; to explain the extent

extent of this duty, and vindicate the poſſibility of it.

All that now remains, is to draw ſome uſeful inferences from this diſcourſe which I have made; and they ſhall be theſe two:

I. That the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt reaſonings in religion, are grounded upon the eſſential perfections of God.

II. That the trueſt and moſt ſubſtantial practice of religion conſiſts in the imitation of God.

I. That the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt reaſonings in religion, are grounded upon the eſſential perfections of God; ſo that even divine revelation itſelf doth ſuppoſe theſe for its foundation, and can ſignify nothing to us, unleſs theſe be firſt known and believed. Unleſs we be firſt perſuaded of the providence of God, and his particular care of mankind, why ſhould we believe that he would make any revelation of himſelf to men? Unleſs it be naturally known to us that God is true; what foundation is there for the belief of his word? And what ſignify the laws and promiſes of God, unleſs natural light do firſt aſſure us of his ſovereign authority and faithfulneſs? So that the principles of natural religion, are the foundation of that which is revealed; and therefore, in reaſon, nothing can be admitted to be a revelation from God, which plainly contradicts his eſſential perfection: and, conſequently, if any pretends divine revelation for this doctrine, That God hath from all eternity abſolutely decreed the eternal ruin of the greateſt part of mankind, without any reſpect to the ſins and demerits of men, I am as certain that this doctrine cannot be of God, as I am ſure that God is good and juſt: becauſe this grates upon the notion that mankind have of goodneſs and juſtice. This is that which no good man would do, and therefore cannot be believed of infinite goodneſs; and therefore, if if *an Apoſtle or Angel from heaven* teach any doctrine which plainly overthrows the goodneſs and juſtice of God, *let him be accurſed.* For every man hath greater aſſurance that God is good and juſt, than he can have of any ſubtle ſpe-

ſpeculations about predeſtination and the decrees of God.

And for the ſame reaſon, I cannot believe, upon the pretended authority or infallibity of any man or church in the world, that God would not have men underſtand their publick prayers, and the leſſons of ſcripture which are read to them. A leſſon not to be underſtood, is nonſenſe: a leſſon is ſomething to be learned; which how it can be without being underſtood, is hard to comprehend.

And as little can I believe, upon the authority of any perſon or church whatſoever, that God ſhould reveal his will to men in the holy ſcriptures, with a deſign to have it hid, and locked up from the generality of mankind in an unknown tongue. And much leſs can I believe (which yet is the expreſs doctrine of the council of Trent) that the ſaving efficacy of the ſacrament depends upon the intention of the prieſt. Which is to ſay, that though people believe, and live never ſo well, they may be damned by ſhoals and whole pariſhes together, at the pleaſure of the prieſt; and for no other reaſon, but becauſe he is ſo wicked as not to intend to ſave them. Can any man believe this, that hath any tolerable notion of God's goodneſs? May we not in this caſe appeal, as Abraham did, to the goodneſs and juſtice of God, and expoſtulate with greater reaſon than he did, much after the ſame manner, *Wilt thou deſtroy the righteous for the wicked? that be far from thee to do after this manner.* To damn the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous people ſhould ly at the mercy of a wicked prieſt, to be damned or ſaved at his pleaſure, *that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* And can there be a greater affront to the goodneſs and juſtice of God, than to imagine he ſhould deal with men after this manner? If this be to do right, there is no poſſibility of doing wrong.

And to give but one inſtance more; I can never believe, upon the authority of any man, or church whatſoever, that our Saviour, in the celebration

bration of his laſt ſupper, did with his own hands give away his own natural body into the hands of his diſciples; and give his blood ſhed, before it was ſhed; that the whole doctrine of Chriſtianity ſhould mainly rely upon the evidence of miracles, the aſſurance of which depends upon the certainty of ſenſe; and yet that an eſſential part of that doctrine ſhould overthrow the certainty of ſenſe. I can never while I live believe theſe two things, that the laſt thing our Saviour did before his death, ſhould be to teach his diſciples not to believe their own ſenſes, as he muſt do if he taught them tranſubſtantiation; and that the very firſt thing he did after he was riſen from the dead, ſhould be to teach them the quite contrary, by appealing to the certainty of ſenſe for the proof of his reſurrection; for when they doubted of his reſurrection, Luke xxiv. 38. *He ſaid unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts ariſe in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myſelf: handle me, and ſee, for a ſpirit hath not fleſh and bones, as ye ſee me have.* If this be a good argument, that it was a real body which they ſaw, becauſe they ſaw and felt fleſh and bones: is it not as good an argument on the other ſide, that what they ſaw in the ſacrament was not his real and natural body, becauſe they could neither ſee nor handle fleſh and bones? So that I cannot believe tranſubſtantiation, unleſs I can believe that truth itſelf can contradict and deſtroy itſelf.

You ſee of what uſe it is to have right and ſteady apprehenſions of the divine perfections; that, theſe being laid for a foundation, we may, upon all occaſions, have recourſe to them, and govern our opinions and reaſonings in religion, about all doubtful matters, by ſuch principles as are clear and unqueſtionable. The

II. Inference is, That the trueſt and moſt ſubſtantial practice of religion, conſiſts in the imitation of the divine perfections, eſpecially the moral perfections of the divine nature, which the ſcripture is wont to comprehend under the name of *holineſs*; and ſuch are the goodneſs, and mercy, and

patience of God, his juſtice and truth, and faithfulneſs. To imitate God in theſe, is true religion; or as St. *James* expreſſes it, *pure religion, and undefiled, ἀμίαντος*, without any flaw or blemiſh, alluding to precious ſtones, the greateſt commendation of which is to be clear and without flaw. *Religio eſt, imitari quem colis*; *That is religion, to imitate him whom we worſhip.* This the Heathen, by the light of nature, did diſcover to be the great end of religion, and the beſt worſhip of the deity, to be like God. Pythagoras was wont to ſay, "That we honour "God moſt, when we are moſt like him in the "temper and diſpoſition of our minds." And Plato to the ſame purpoſe, "That the height "and perfection of goodneſs, is to reſemble God, "as near as is poſſible; and that we reſemble God, "in being juſt, and holy, and wiſe." So likewiſe Hierocles, "That a good man imitates God, "in the meaſures of love and friendſhip, who hates "no man, and extends his benignity to all mankind." Plutarch hath an excellent diſcourſe about the patience of God towards ſinners, and gives this as one reaſon why God doth not preſently puniſh offenders, "That he might give an example to "us of gentleneſs and patience, and check the fury "and violence of men in revenging injuries upon "one another; which nothing will do more effectually, than to conſider that gentleneſs and forbearance are an imitation of the divine perfection." And then he cites an excellent ſaying of Plato, "That God manifeſted himſelf, and diſplayed "his perfections in the world, for our imitation; "true virtue being nothing elſe but an imitation of "the divine nature." For there is no greater benefit man can receive from God's hand, than to become virtuous by the imitation and purſuit of thoſe excellencies and perfections which are in God. Seneca likewiſe hath many paſſages to this purpoſe, *Inter viros bonos ac Deum amicitia eſt, imò etiam neceſſitudo & ſimilitudo*; *Between God and good men there is a friendſhip, yea, and an intimacy and likeneſs*: And that a virtuous man is *diſcipulus æmulatorque*

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& vera progenies Dei; a diſciple and imitator, and the very genuine offspring of God. So that the light of nature, and the reaſon of mankind, have always placed the perfection of religion in the imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections.

And this is very agreeable to the language and ſenſe of the holy ſcriptures, which every where make the practice of religion to conſiſt in our conformity to God, and the laws which he hath given us; which are nothing elſe but a tranſcript of his nature. The great buſineſs of religion is to do the will of God; and *this is the will of God, our ſanctification*; and our ſanctification is our conformity to the holineſs of God; and this is the ſcope of the general exhortations of ſcripture, to perſuade us to holineſs, that is, to an imitation of the moral perfections of the divine nature, 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly beloved; let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear of God.* 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. *As he which hath called you is holy, ſo be ye holy in all manner of converſation, becauſe it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.* 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. ſpeaking of the Chriſtian religion, which he calls *the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby alſo* (ſays he) *are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes, that by theſe we might be partakers of a divine nature, having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world through luſt.* So that the holineſs the goſpel deſigns to bring us to, is a *participation of the divine nature*, which we can no otherwiſe partake of, but by an imitation of the divine perfections. This is that which the ſcripture expreſſes to us by the terms of *regeneration*, the *new man*, and the *new creature*. And therefore thoſe who are converted from a wicked and ſinful ſtate, and reclaimed to goodneſs, are ſaid to *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs, and the holineſs of truth.* Eph. iv. 23. *To be renewed after the image of him that created us*, Coloſ. iii. 10. This is to be *the ſons and children of God, to imitate and reſemble God in our diſ-*

poſitions and manners. Eph. v. 1. *Be ye therefore,* μιμηταὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, *imitators of God, as dear children.* Phil. ii. 15. *That ye may be blameleſs and ſincere, the ſons of God without rebuke, in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe nation.* 1 John iii. 10. *In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the devil; whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God.* There have been great enquiries concerning the marks of a child of God; this is the true character, and that which in effect comprehends all others, our imitation and reſemblance of God in thoſe perfections, wherein he is ſet forth for a pattern to us. And in this mainly conſiſts the practice both of natural religion, and of true Chriſtianity.

But does not religion conſiſt very much in the duties of God's worſhip, in the exerciſe of piety and devotion, in conſtant and frequent prayers to God, and in the celebration of his goodneſs by praiſe and thankſgiving, in reading and hearing, and meditating upon God's word, in faſting and abſtinence, and keeping our bodies in ſubjection to our ſpirits, and in frequent receiving of the holy ſacrament? To this I anſwer, that religion doth conſiſt very much in the due performance of theſe duties, and they are unqueſtionable and neceſſary parts of religion, and the means appointed by God for the begetting and increaſing in us ſuch diſpoſitions of mind as render us moſt like to God, and for the production of all the fruits of goodneſs, and holineſs, and righteouſneſs in our lives.

But then it is to be conſidered, that theſe exerciſes of piety and devotion are but the means of religion, and not the ultimate end and deſign of it. All theſe do but ſerve to bring us to a nearer reſemblance of God; and where they fail of this end, and are performed for their own ſakes only, and we reſt in them, without aiming at any thing farther, they loſe their nature, becauſe they are not uſed as means, but reſted in, as if they were the end of religion. And it is to be feared there are many which fall into this fatal miſtake about religion, and think that if they do but ſerve God in their families, and go

go to church, and behave themſelves there with devotion and reverence, and at certain ſeaſons receive the ſacrament, they are truly religious, and very good Chriſtians; when all this while they take no care to improve themſelves in real goodneſs, by an inward conformity of their minds to God, and the real reformation and amendment of their lives, by mortifying their luſts, and ſubduing their appetites and paſſions to the laws of reaſon and religion, by *putting on, as the elect of God, bowels of kindneſs*; by being true and faithful, righteous and juſt, patient and merciful, *as their Father which is in heaven is* ſo; and by *forbearing one another*, in caſe of provocation, and *forgiving one another, even as God, for Chriſt's ſake, hath forgiven us*; by *purifying themſelves as God is pure*, and endeavouring to *be holy in all manner of converſation, as he who hath called them is holy*; when all this while they are as covetous, and earthly minded, and, to ſerve their covetouſneſs, will ſtrain a point of truth or juſtice, and hardly do an act of charity in their whole lives, but what is extorted from them by mere importunity, or ſome ſuch urgent neceſſity, in point of decency and reputation, that for ſhame of the world they know not how to avoid it; when their paſſions are as fierce and ungoverned, their hearts as full of gall and bitterneſs, their tongues of ſlander and evil-ſpeaking, their humours as proud and ſurly, and cenſorious, as theirs can be who are openly profane, and ſeem to neglect and deſpiſe all religion: and yet becauſe they ſerve God, (as they call it) and make an external appearance of piety and devotion, are good churchmen, and attend upon the ordinances of God, they think they have diſcharged the whole buſineſs of religion admirably well, and are very good *children of God*, and in a ſtate of great grace and favour with him. Whereas the performance of all theſe duties, and the uſe of all theſe means ſeparated from that which is the great end of religion, the conformity of ourſelves to God, in thoſe qualities and diſpoſitions which I have mentioned, is ſo far

far from finding acceptance with God, that it is an abomination to him. So God every where declares in ſcripture, telling us, that *the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*; and that he diſdains to be praiſed by men of unhallowed lips and lives; and that unleſs with *the praiſes we offer to him, we order our converſation aright, we ſhall not ſee the ſalvation of God.* With what contempt does he ſpeak of this formal and external religion, without the power of it upon our hearts and lives! *To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices to me? Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of rivers of oil? He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Is not this the faſt which I have choſen, to break the bands of wickedneſs, and to let the oppreſſed go free; to deal thy bread to the hungry; and that thou bring the poor, that are caſt out, to thine houſe; when thou ſeeſt the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyſelf from thine own fleſh?*

Nor is it *hearing of the word* that will avail us, unleſs *we be doers of it. Bleſſed are they* (ſays our Saviour) *that hear the word of God, and keep it. He that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them, ſhall be likened unto a wiſe man who hath built his houſe upon a rock.* Nor will bare receiving the ſacrament recommend us to God; but performing the obligation, which thereby we take upon ourſelves, to abſtain from all ſin and wickedneſs; otherwiſe *we tread under foot the Son of God, and profane the blood of the covenant, whereby we ſhould be ſanctified, as if it were an unholy thing.* Can any man think *that* to be religion, which has no effect upon the lives of men, which does not teach them to govern their words and actions, who reads thoſe plain words of St. James? *If any man among you ſeem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction,*

affliction, and to keep himſelf unſpotted from the world. When religion produceth theſe real effects, then the means of religion do truly ſerve the end of it; and we are not only *hearers of the word, but doers of it,* and *ſhall be bleſſed in our deed.*

So that as there is an obligation upon us to uſe the means of religion, which God hath inſtituted, with great care and conſcience; ſo we ſhould chiefly mind that which is the end of all religion, which is to make us *partakers of a divine nature,* and make us like to God, eſpecially in thoſe amiable and excellent qualities, which are the glory and beauty of the divine nature, his benignity and goodneſs, his mercy and patience. Theſe, becauſe they are the primary perfections of God, are the principal duties both of natural and revealed religion, and of an eternal and indiſpenſable obligation; becauſe they have their foundation in the nature of God, which is fixed and unalterable: And all poſitive inſtitutions, when they come in competition with theſe, are to ſtoop and vail to them. Natural and moral duties, eſpecially thoſe of goodneſs, and mercy, and charity, are ſo ſtrongly bound upon us, that nothing in any revealed religion can cancel the obligation of them, or juſtify the violation of theſe great and indiſpenſable laws. Our Saviour, in his religion, has declared nothing to the prejudice of them; but, on the contrary, has ſtraitened our obligation to them as much as is poſſible: *The Son of man came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them*; ſo that they *know not what manner of ſpirit they are of,* who think to pleaſe God by hating men, who are made after the image of God, and *by killing one another, to do him good ſervice*; who, to advance his cauſe and religion in the world, will break through all the obligations of nature and civil ſociety, undermine government, and diſturb the peace of mankind.

Whereas our Saviour did not by any thing in his religion deſign to alter the civil government of the world, or to leſſen and diminiſh the rights of Princes, or to ſet men looſe from allegiance to them, or to make treaſon and rebellion, bloody wars and barbarous

barous maſſacres lawful, for the propagating of his faith. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the Pope; but yet he depoſed no Princes, nor excommunicated and diſcharged their ſubjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their oppoſition to his religion; he hath aſſumed no ſuch power to himſelf. *By what authority then doth* his vicar *do theſe things; and who gave him this authority?* Our Lord tells us plainly, *his kingdom was not of this world*; and that without any diſtinction of *in ordine ad ſpiritualia*, and therefore he wreſted no Prince's kingdom out of his hands, nor ſeized it as forfeited to himſelf.

But this power the Pope claims to himſelf, and hath exerciſed it many a time, diſturbing the peace of nations, and exerciſing the moſt barbarous cruelties in the world, under a pretence of zeal for God and religion; as if becauſe religion is ſo very good a thing in itſelf, it would warrant men to do the very worſt things for its ſake; which is the ready way to render religion contemptible and odious, and to make two of the beſt things in the world, God and religion, good for nothing.

If we would preſerve in the minds of men any reverence and eſteem for religion, we muſt take heed how we deſtroy the principles of natural religion, and undermine the peace and happineſs of human ſociety, for the glory of God, and under pretence of following divine revelation, and being led by a church that cannot err: for every church doth certainly err, that teacheth any thing plainly contrary to the principles and dictates of natural religion, and utterly inconſiſtent with the eſſential perfections of God, and with the peace and order of the world; for *God is not the God of confuſion, but of order*; which St. Paul appealeth to as a principle of eternal truth, and naturally known: But they that pretend that religion prompts men to ſedition and cruelty, do repreſent God as *the God of confuſion and not of order.*

Therefore whatever men may through an ignorant zeal, or for ambitious ends, pretend to be religious; let

let us place it in that which is unqueſtionable, the imitation of the divine perfections, and let us (as the Apoſtle exhorts) *put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindneſs, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, and above all let us put on charity, which is the very bond of perfection.* The great perfection of the divine nature, or rather the very eſſence of God, is love. So St. John ſpeaks, *God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.* And it is very remarkable, that in theſe very qualities of charity, and kindneſs, and compaſſion, which we peculiarly call humanity, we approach neareſt to the divinity itſelf, and that the contrary diſpoſitions do transform us into wild beaſts and devils.

And yet as ſeverely as I ſpeak againſt theſe principles and practices, I have an hearty pity and compaſſion for thoſe who are under the power of ſo great a deluſion; and upon a pretence of being made the only true Chriſtians in the world, are reduced from humanity itſelf; and ſo far from being made good Chriſtians by theſe principles, that they are hardly left to be men; *being blinded, and led by the blind, they fall into the ditch* of the groſſeſt and fouleſt immoralities; ſuch as are plainly enough condemned by the light of nature, if there were no Bible in the world.

Not but that we Proteſtants have our faults and our follies too, and thoſe (God knows!) too many and too viſible; we poſſeſs more truth, but there is little peace among us, and yet God is as well and as often in ſcripture called *the God of peace*, as *the God of truth.* In this great light and liberty of the reformed religion, we are apt to be wanton, and to quarrel and fall out; we are full of heats and animoſities, of ſchiſms and diviſions, and *the way of peace we have not known.* God grant that at laſt *in this our day* (when it concerns us ſo much) we may *know the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes!*

You ſee in what things the practice of religion mainly conſiſts, in our likeneſs to God, and reſemblance of him in holineſs and goodneſs; and without this

we

we are utterly incapable of happineſs: we cannot *ſee* God, unleſs *we be like him.* The preſence of God can adminiſter no pleaſure, no felicity to us, till we be changed into his image; till we come to this temper, to hate ſin, and delight in purity and holineſs, we can have no delightful communion with the holy God; till our paſſions be ſubdued, and our ſouls diſpoſſeſt of thoſe deviliſh and ungodlike qualities of hatred and malice, of revenge and impatience; and till we be endued with the ſpirit of univerſal goodneſs and charity, we are not fit company for our heavenly Father; we are not qualified *to dwell with God*, who is *love, and dwells in love.* So far as we are defective in theſe divine qualities and perfections, ſo far we fall ſhort of the temper of happineſs.

There is a direct and eternal oppoſition between the holy and good God, and the evil diſpoſitions of wicked men; and till this oppoſition be removed, it is impoſſible we ſhould find any felicity in the enjoyment of God. Now the nature of God is fixed and unchangeable; God cannot recede from his own perfection, and therefore we muſt quit our ſins: Thou canſt not change God, therefore change thyſelf; and rather think of putting off thy corrupt nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, *with whom is no variableneſs nor ſhadow of turning.* God condeſcended to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of happineſs; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own nature to make us happy.

SER-

SERMON CXXXII.

The happineſs of God.

1 TIM. i. xi. *The bleſſed God* ——

The whole verſe runs thus:

According to the glorious goſpel of the bleſſed God, which was committed to my truſt.

SInce all men naturally deſire happineſs, and thirſt after it, methinks we ſhould all deſire to know what it is, and where it is to be found, and how it is to be attained by us, in that degree in which creatures are capable of it. What Job ſays of wiſdom may be ſaid alſo of happineſs, *God underſtandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.* He only, who is perfectly poſſeſt of it himſelf, knows wherein it conſiſts, and what are the true ingredients of it.

So that to direct us in our ſearch after happineſs, the beſt way will be to contemplate and conſider the divine nature, which is the perfect pattern and idea of happineſs, and the original ſpring and fountain of all the felicity that creatures are capable of. And to that end, I have pitched upon theſe words, wherein the Apoſtle attributes this perfection of bleſſedneſs or happineſs to God, *The bleſſed God.*

And though this be as eſſential a part as any other of that notion which mankind have of God from the light of nature, yet I no where find in all the new teſtament, this attribute of happineſs given to God, but only twice in this epiſtle. It is true indeed, the title of bleſſedneſs is frequently given both to God and Chriſt, but in another ſenſe, and in a quite different

ferent notion: as Mark xiv. 61. where the High-prieſt asks our Saviour, *Art thou the Chriſt the ſon of the Bleſſed?* τῦ εὐλογητῦ, *of him that is celebrated and praiſed*; 2 Cor. xi. 31. *The God and father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who is bleſſed for evermore.* So likewiſe, Rom. i. 25. *The Creator bleſſed for evermore:* Which likewiſe is ſaid of Chriſt, Rom. ix. 5. *Of whom Chriſt came, who is over all, God bleſſed for evermore*; that is, *for ever to be praiſed and celebrated.* But in all theſe texts the Greek word is εὐλογητὸς, which though we tranſlate *bleſſed*, yet it is a quite different notion from the title of bleſſedneſs, which is given to God in the text, where the word is not εὐλογητὸς, but μακάριος, *the bleſſed* or *happy God*; and this title is not any where in all the New Teſtament, (that I know of) given to God, but here in the text, and chap. vi. ver. 15. where our Lord Jeſus Chriſt (who alſo is God) is called *the bleſſed and the only potentate.* And whether this title of *the bleſſed* or *the happy God*, be here in the text given to God the Father, or to his eternal Son, our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, is not ſo much material to my preſent purpoſe to enquire. For ſuppoſe it be Chriſt, who is here called *the bleſſed God*, this however is certain, that *bleſſedneſs* or *happineſs* is a title belonging to God, which is all that is neceſſary for a foundation of my preſent diſcourſe.

In ſpeaking of this argument, I ſhall do theſe three things:

I. Shew what we are to underſtand by the happineſs of God, and what are the eſſential ingredients of it.

II. That this title doth belong to God, and that the divine nature is perfectly bleſſed and happy.

III. How far creatures are capable of happineſs, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it: And ſhall then make ſome inferences from my diſcourſe upon this argument.

I. I will conſider what we are to underſtand by the bleſſedneſs or happineſs of God, and what are the eſſential ingredients of it. Now the notion of happineſs, taken at its higheſt pitch (as we muſt neceſ-

ſarily

sarily do when we apply it to God) is no other than a fixed and immoveable state of contentment and satisfaction, of pleasure and delight, resulting from the secure possession and enjoyment of all that is good and desirable, that is, of all excellency and perfection; so that these following ingredients must go to make up a perfect state of happiness:

1. Perfect knowledge to understand what it is that constitutes happiness, and to know when one is really possest of it. For as he is not happy, who is so only in imagination or a dream, without any real foundation in the thing; for he may be pleased with his condition, and yet be far enough from being truly happy: so, on the other hand, he that has all other necessary ingredients of happiness, and only wants this, that he doth not think himself so, cannot be happy. For this we often see in the imperfect felicity of this world, that many men who have all the materials and circumstances of a worldly happiness about them; yet, by the unskilful management of the matter, and from a lightness and injudiciousness of mind, not knowing when they are well, they make an hard shift, even when they are in as good circumstances, as it is almost possible for men to be in this world, to be very discontented and miserable in their own opinions. But God perfectly knows both what makes happiness, and that he is possest of it.

2. To perfect happiness is likewise required a full power to do whatever conduceth to happiness, and likewise to check and controul whatever would be an hinderance and disturbance to it; and therefore no being is as happy as it can be, that is not all-sufficient, and hath not within its power and reach whatever is necessary to an happy condition, and necessary to secure and continue that happiness against all attempts and accidents whatsoever.

3. There is wisdom also required to direct this power, and manage it in such a manner, as it may effectually conduce to this end; and this is very different from mere power abstractedly considered; for one may have all the materials of happiness, and yet want the wisdom and skill to put them so together,

as to frame an happy condition out of them; and he is not happy, who doth not throughly underſtand the proper method and means of compaſſing and ſecuring his own happineſs.

4. Another moſt conſiderable and eſſential ingredient of happineſs is goodneſs; without which, as there can be no true majeſty and greatneſs, ſo neither can there be any felicity or happineſs. Now goodneſs is a generous diſpoſition of mind to communicate and diffuſe itſelf, by making others partakers of its happineſs, in ſuch degrees as they are capable of it, and as wiſdom ſhall direct: For he is not ſo happy as he may be, who hath not the pleaſure of making others ſo, and of ſeeing them put into an happy condition by his means, which is the higheſt pleaſure (I had almoſt ſaid pride, but I may truly ſay glory) of a good and great mind: For by ſuch communications of himſelf, an immenſe and all-ſufficient Being doth not leſſen himſelf, or put any thing out of his power, but doth rather enlarge and magnify himſelf; and does, as I may ſay, give great eaſe and delight to a full and fruitful being, without the leaſt diminution of his power and happineſs. For the cauſe and original of all other beings can make nothing ſo independent upon itſelf, as not ſtill to maintain his intereſt in it, to have it always under his power and government; and no being can rebel againſt his Maker, without extreme hazard to himſelf.

5. Perfect happineſs doth imply the exerciſe of all other virtues, which are ſuitable to ſo perfect a Being, upon all proper and fitting occaſions: that is, that ſo perfect a Being do nothing that is contrary to, or unbecoming his holineſs and righteouſneſs, his truth and faithfulneſs, which are eſſential to a perfect Being; and for ſuch a Being to act contrary to them in any caſe, would be to create diſquiet and diſturbance to itſelf: For this is a certain rule, and never fails, that nothing can act contrary to its own nature without reluctancy and diſpleaſure, which in moral agents is that which we call *guilt*; for guilt is nothing elſe but the trouble and diſquiet which ariſeth in one's

one's mind, from the conſciouſneſs of having done ſomething which is contrary to the perfective principles of his being, that is, ſomething that doth not become him, and which, being what he is, he ought not to have done; which we cannot imagine ever to befal ſo perfect and immutable a Being as God is.

6. Perfect happineſs implies in it the ſettled and ſecure poſſeſſion of all thoſe excellencies and perfections; for if any of theſe were liable to fail, or be diminiſhed, ſo much would be taken off from perfect and compleat happineſs. If the Deity were ſubject to any change or impairment of his condition, ſo that either his knowledge, or power, or wiſdom, or goodneſs, or any other perfection, could any ways decline or fall off, there would be a proportionable abatement of happineſs. And from all theſe does reſult in the

7th and *laſt* place, infinite contentment and ſatisfaction, pleaſure and delight, which is the very eſſence of happineſs.

1. Infinite contentment and ſatisfaction in this condition. And well may happineſs be contented with itſelf; that is, with ſuch a condition, that he that is poſſeſt of it, can neither deſire it ſhould be better, nor have any cauſe to fear it ſhould be worſe.

2. Pleaſure and delight, which is ſomething more than contentment: For one may be contented with an affliction, and painful condition, in which he is far from taking any pleaſure and delight. *No affliction is joyous for the preſent, but grievous,* as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, Heb. xii. But there cannot be perfect happineſs without pleaſure in our condition. Full pleaſure is a certain mixture of love and joy, hard to be expreſſed in words, but certainly known by inward ſenſe and experience.

And thus I have endeavoured to deſcribe to you, as well as I could, according to our imperfect conceptions and expreſſions of God, the happineſs of the divine nature, and wherein it conſiſts. I proceed to the

II. Thing I propoſed, which was to ſhew, that this attribute of perfection doth belong to God; and that the divine nature is perfectly bleſſed and happy; and this is ſo univerſal an acknowledgment of natural light, that it would be a very ſuperfluous and impertinent work, to trouble you with particular citations of heathen authors to this purpoſe; nothing being more frequent in them, than to call the Deity, *beatiſſimam & perfectiſſimam naturam, the moſt happy and moſt perfect being*, and therefore happy, becauſe felicity doth naturally reſult from perfection. It ſhall ſuffice to take notice of theſe two things out of heathen writers, to my preſent purpoſe:

1. That they accounted happineſs ſo eſſential to the notion of a God, that this was one of the ways which they took to find what properties were fit to attribute to God, and what not; to conſider, what things are conſiſtent with happineſs, or inconſiſtent with it; and whatever did ſignify happineſs, and was a perfection conſiſtent with it, they aſcribed to God, as a ſuitable property of the divine nature; and whatever was otherwiſe, they removed it from God, as unfit to be ſaid of him.

2. Whatever differences there were among the philoſophers concerning the perfections of the divine nature, they all agreed in the perfect felicity of it: even Epicurus himſelf, who ſo boldly attempted to ſtrip the divine nature of moſt of its perfections, by denying that God either made or governed the world; whereby he took away at once his being the firſt cauſe and original of all things, and his goodneſs likewiſe, and wiſdom, and power, and juſtice, or at leaſt made all theſe uſeleſs, by taking away all occaſion and opportunity for the exerciſe of them; yet this man does frequently own, and profeſs to believe the happineſs of the divine nature; and then, out of an ignorant and officious kindneſs to the Deity, and (as he pretended) for the ſecurity of his felicity, did in effect, take away his other perfections; he would by no means put God to the trouble and burden of making the world, or taking care of the affairs of it, leſt this ſhould diſcompoſe

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the Deity, or be an interruption or diſturbance of his eaſe and felicity. For thus Lucretius, the great diſciple of Epicurus, deſcribes his opinion of the divine nature.

Omnis enim, per ſe, divûm naturâ neceſſe eſt,
Immortali ævo ſummâ cum pace fruatur,
Semota ab noſtris rebus, ſejunctaque longè.
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
Ipſa ſuis pollens opibus, nihil indiga noſtri,
Nec benè promeritis capitur, nec tangitur irâ.

That is, "It is neceſſary that the divine nature ſhould "be happy, and therefore altogether unconcerned in "our affairs; free from all grief and danger, ſuffi-"cient for itſelf, and ſtanding in need of no body, "neither pleaſed with our good actions, nor pro-"voked by our faults." This was a very falſe notion both of God and happineſs, to imagine that the care of the world ſhould be a pain and diſturbance to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodneſs. But this is not now my buſineſs to conſider; that which is to my preſent purpoſe, is, that the happineſs of the divine nature was univerſally owned; and that bleſſedneſs is ſo inſeparable from the notion of a Deity, that whoever profeſſes to believe a God, muſt acknowledge him to be perfectly happy.

As for the teſtimony of ſcripture, I have already told you, that there are but two texts wherein this title of μακάριος, the happy or bleſſed, is given to God: but by conſequence the ſcripture every where declares the happineſs of the divine nature, *viz.* wherever it ſpeaks of the excellency and perfection of his being, of his knowledge, and power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and of the eternity and unchangeableneſs of theſe, and of the infinite delight and complacency which he takes in the enjoyment of theſe perfections. I ſhall now proceed to the

III. And laſt thing which I propoſed to conſider, *viz.* How far creatures are capable of happineſs, and by what ways and means they may be made

made partakers of it. They are not capable of abſolute and perfect happineſs,, becauſe that reſults from infinite perfection, which is no where to be found but in God: It remains then, that creatures are only capable of being happy in a finite and limited degree, by the reſemblance of God, and by the enjoyment of him; by being like to him, and by our likeneſs to him, being qualified for his favour, and for the enjoyment of him.

As we are creatures of a finite power, and limited underſtandings, and a mutable nature, we do neceſſarily want many of theſe perfections, which are the cauſe and ingredients of a perfect happineſs. We are far from being ſufficient for our own happineſs; we are neither ſo of ourſelves, nor can we make ourſelves ſo by our own power; for neither are we wiſe enough for our own direction, nor good enough for our own ſatisfaction. All the happineſs that we are capable of, is by communication from him, who is the original and fountain of it; by our being made *partakers of the divine nature*, (as St. Peter ſpeaks) by our reſemblance of God in thoſe perfections which are the moſt eſſential ingredients of happineſs, his goodneſs and righteouſneſs, and truth, and holineſs; theſe do immediately qualify us for the favour and friendſhip of Almighty God, and for the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of him; and the favour of God, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, and his friendſhip and good-will to us, ſupplies all the defects of power and wiſdom in us: For God being our friend, we have an intereſt in all his perfections, and a ſecurity, that, as occaſion requires, they will all be employed for our benefit and advantage; ſo that though we are *weak in ourſelves*, we are *ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*, and are *able to do all things through him ſtrengthening us*; and though *we want wiſdom*, we may have free recourſe to the fountain of it, and *ask it of God, who gives to all liberally, and upbraideth not.* And it is next to having theſe perfections in ourſelves, to know where to have them

for

for asking, whenever we ſtand in need of them, ſo far as is neceſſary to our happineſs.

So that though our happineſs depend upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify ourſelves for it, (and God is always ready to aſſiſt us by his grace to this purpoſe) it is really and in effect in our own power; and we are every whit as ſafe and happy in God's care and protection of us, as if we were ſufficient for ourſelves. However, this is the higheſt happineſs that the condition of a creature is capable of, to have all our defects ſupplied in ſo liberal a manner by the bounty of another, and to have a free recourſe to the fountain of happineſs, and at laſt to be admitted to the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of him, *in whoſe preſence is fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore.* I have done with the three things I propoſed to ſpeak to.

But to what purpoſe, may ſome ſay, is this long deſcription and diſcourſe of happineſs? How are we the wiſer and the better for it? I anſwer; Very much, in ſeveral reſpects.

1. This plainly ſhews us, that Atheiſm is a very melancholy and miſchievous thing; it would take away the fountain of happineſs, and the only perfect pattern of it; endeavours at once to extinguiſh the being of God, and all the life and comfort of mankind, ſo that we could neither form any idea of happineſs, or be in any poſſibility of attaining it. For it is plain, we are not ſufficient for it of ourſelves; and if there be not a God, there is nothing that can make us ſo. God is *the true light of the world*, and a thouſand times more neceſſary to the comfort and happineſs of mankind, than the ſun itſelf, which is but a dark ſhadow of that infinitely more bright and glorious being; *the happy and only potentate* (as the Apoſtle deſcribes him in the latter end of this epiſtle) *who only hath immortality, dwelling in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath ſeen, nor can ſee*, meaning in this mortal ſtate.

So that the greateſt enemies, and moſt injurious of all others to mankind, are thoſe who would baniſh

niſh the belief of a God out of the world; becauſe this is *to lay the ax to the root of the tree*, and at one blow to cut off all hopes of happineſs from mankind. So that he is a fool indeed, that *ſays in his heart, there is no God*; that is, that wiſheth there were none; becauſe it is not poſſible for a man to wiſh worſe to himſelf, and more effectually to deſtroy his own happineſs.

2. If the divine nature be ſo infinitely and compleatly happy, this is a very great confirmation of our faith and hope concerning the happineſs of another life, which the ſcripture deſcribes to us, by the ſight and enjoyment of God. As we are creatures, we are not capable of the happineſs that is abſolutely and infinitely perfect; becauſe our nature is but finite and limited; but *the bleſſed God*, who is infinitely happy himſelf, can alſo make us happy according to our finite meaſure and capacity. For, as he that is the firſt and original being, can communicate being to other things; ſo he that is the fountain of happineſs, can derive and convey happineſs to his creatures.

And we ſhall the more eaſily believe this, when we conſider that goodneſs, as it is the prime perfection, ſo is it likewiſe the chief felicity of the divine nature. It is his glory and delight to communicate himſelf, and ſhed abroad his goodneſs; and the higheſt expreſſion of the divine goodneſs, is to communicate happineſs to his creatures, and to be willing that they ſhould ſhare and partake with him in it. Baſe and envious natures are narrow and contracted, and love to confine their enjoyments and good things to themſelves, and are loth that others ſhould take part with them: but the moſt noble and moſt generous minds are moſt free and enlarged, and cannot be happy themſelves, unleſs they find or make others ſo.

This is the higheſt pitch of goodneſs, and conſequently the higheſt contentment, and the ſupreme delight of the divine nature. Now it is natural to every being, to be moſt frequent and abundant in thoſe acts in which it finds the greateſt pleaſures; to

to be good, and to do good, is the ſupreme felicity of God himſelf; therefore we may eaſily believe, that he is very ready and forward to make us happy, by all the ways that are agreeable to his wiſdom and righteouſneſs; and that he is alſo willing to make us abundantly ſo, and to advance us to the higheſt degree of felicity, of which our nature is capable, if we do not render ourſelves incapable of ſuch a bleſſing, by an obſtinate refuſal of it, and utter indiſpoſition for it.

This, I ſay, is very credible, becauſe the happineſs of God himſelf conſiſts in that propenſion and diſpoſition of nature, which tends to make others happy. And if there can be any acceſſion to that which is infinite, God himſelf finds a new pleaſure and felicity in the communication of his goodneſs to his creatures; and therefore is repreſented in ſcripture, as glad of *the converſion of a ſinner*, becauſe the ſinner hereby becomes capable of the happineſs which God deſigned for his creatures, and is always ready to confer upon them whenever they are qualified for it, and he can, with the honour of his own perfections, beſtow it upon them.

There are two things which raiſe our hopes and expectation of good from any perſon, if he be able and willing to beſtow upon us what we hope for from him. Now if any one can confer happineſs upon us, it is he who is infinitely poſſeſt of it, and hath all the treaſures of it in himſelf; and that God only is, who as he is able, ſo he is willing to make us happy, if we be qualified for it; and it is no impairing of his happineſs to make others happy, for even that goodneſs which inclines him to communicate happineſs to others is a great part of his own felicity; ſo that, as our Saviour argues, *becauſe I live, you ſhall live alſo*; we may reaſon in like manner, that *becauſe God is happy, we ſhall be happy alſo*, if we do but ſincerely deſire and endeavour to qualify ourſelves for it. The goodneſs of God does ſtrongly incline him to deſire our happineſs, and makes him willing and ready to beſtow it upon us, whenever we are capable to receive it.

So

So that the goodneſs of God is the great foundation of all our hopes, and the firmeſt ground of our aſſurance of a bleſſed immortality. It is the happineſs of the divine nature to communicate himſelf; and the communications of God's goodneſs to us are the cauſe of our happineſs; and therefore, both for our example and encouragement, the goodneſs of God ought always to be repreſented to the greateſt advantage, and we ſhould endeavour to poſſeſs our minds with a firm belief and perſuaſion of it, and to remove from the divine nature (which we all acknowledge to have infinitely more goodneſs than is to be found in any of the ſons of men) whatever we would not attribute to a good man, and to vindicate God from all ſuſpicion of envy and ill-will, of cruelty and arbitrary dealing with his creatures. And I cannot apprehend why men ſhould be averſe from theſe ſo agreeable and delightful apprehenſions of God; or how it ſhould be any man's intereſt to leſſen the goodneſs of God; for moſt certainly the better God is in himſelf, the better and happier it will be for us all, if it be not our own fault.

3. From what hath been ſaid concerning the happineſs of the divine nature, we may learn wherein our happineſs muſt conſiſt, namely in the image and in the favour of God; in the favour of God, as the cauſe of our happineſs; and in the image of God, as a neceſſary inward diſpoſition and qualification for it. Unleſs God love us, we cannot be happy; for miſerable are they whom he hates: for God to ſay of any man, that *his ſoul hath no pleaſure in him*, imports as great miſery, and as dreadful a curſe as can be imagined, and *his ſoul* can *have no pleaſure* in a bad man; for *he loveth righteouſneſs and hateth iniquity: he is not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with him: the wicked ſhall not ſtand in his ſight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity.* Nay, if we could ſuppoſe that he could love and take pleaſure in any perſon that is unlike to him, (which is impoſſible) yet that perſon could not be happy, becauſe he would

would want that inward frame and diſpoſition of mind, which is neceſſary to happineſs: For the very ſame cauſes and ingredients which make up the happineſs of God, muſt, in an inferior degree, be found in us, otherwiſe we cannot be happy; no, though a man were in heaven, if he be ſtill a bad man, *cœlum, non animum mutavit*, he hath only *changed the climate*, and is gone into another country, but he bears himſelf ſtill about him, and his mind is not changed, which would ſignify a thouſand times more to his happineſs, than any place or outward circumſtance whatſoever. A bad man, whereſoever he goes, hath *a root of gall and bitterneſs* within him, and is miſerable from himſelf; he hath a fiend in his own breaſt, and the fuel of hell in a guilty conſcience.

For there is a certain temper and diſpoſition of mind that is neceſſary and eſſential to happineſs, and that is holineſs and goodneſs, which is the nature of God; and ſo much as any perſon departs from this temper, ſo far he removes himſelf, and runs away from happineſs: And as ſin is *a departure from God*, ſo the puniſhment of it is likewiſe expreſſed by *departing from him: Depart from me ye curſed; depart from me all ye that work iniquity, I know you not.*

And this is one great part of the miſery of thoſe degenerate and accurſed ſpirits, the Devils, who are for ever baniſhed from the preſence of God, that they are of a temper quite contrary to God, wicked and impure, envious and malicious, miſchievous and cruel; and ſuch a temper is naturally a torment and diſquiet to itſelf. And here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil diſpoſition of our minds; and till this be cured, and ſet right, it is as impoſſible for any of us to be happy, as it is for a limb that is out of joint to be at eaſe. And the external preſence of God, and a local heaven (if we could imagine ſuch a perſon to be admitted into it, and ſee all the glories of that place, and the pleaſures and delights of that ſtate) all this, I ſay, would ſignify no more to make a bad man happy, than heaps

of gold and diamonds, and conſorts of the moſt delicious muſick, and a well-ſpread table, and a rich and coſtly bed, would contribute to a man's eaſe in the paroxyſm of a fever, or in a violent fit of the ſtone: becauſe the man hath that within which torments him, and till that be removed, he cannot poſſibly be at eaſe. The man's ſpirit is out of order, and off the hinges, and toſt from its center; and till that be ſet right, and reſtored to its proper place and ſtate by goodneſs and holineſs, the man will be perpetually reſtleſs, and cannot poſſibly have any eaſe or peace in his mind: For how can there be peace, how can there be happineſs to him, who is of a temper directly oppoſite to it? *The wicked*, ſaith the Prophet, Iſai. lvii. 20, 21. *is like the troubled ſea when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt.* So long as there is impurity in our hearts, and guilt upon our conſciences, they will be reſtleſsly working; *there is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.* The Hebrew word which we tranſlate *peace*, ſignifies all kind of happineſs; there can be no felicity to a bad man. The conſideration whereof ſhould put us upon the moſt ſerious and earneſt endeavours to be like God, that we may be capable of his favour, and partakers of his felicity. The divine nature is the only perfect idea of happineſs, and nothing but our conformity to it can make us happy.

I have been ſo long upon this argument, on purpoſe to convince men of the neceſſity of holineſs and goodneſs, and all other virtues, to our preſent and future happineſs. They underſtand not the nature of happineſs, who hope for it, or imagine they can attain it in any other way. The author and the fountain of happineſs, he that made us, and alone can make us happy, cannot make us ſo in any other way, than by planting in us ſuch a diſpoſition of mind, as is in truth *a participation of the divine nature*, and by endowing us with ſuch qualities as are the neceſſary materials and ingredients of happineſs. There is no way to partake of the felicity of God,

bleſſed

bleſſed for ever, but by becoming holy and righteous, good and merciful, as he is.

All men naturally deſire happineſs, and ſeek after it, and are, as they think, travelling towards it, but generally they miſtake their way. Many are eager in the purſuit of the things of this world, and greedily catch at pleaſures, and riches and honour, as if theſe could make them happy; but when they come to embrace them, they find that they are but clouds and ſhadows, and that there is no real and ſubſtantial felicity in them. *Many ſay, who will ſhew us any good?* meaning the good things of this world; *corn, and wine, and oil:* But wouldſt thou be happy indeed, endeavour to be like the pattern of happineſs, and the fountain of it; addreſs thyſelf to him in the prayer of the Pſalmiſt, *Lord lift thou upon me the light of thy countenance, and thou ſhalt put more joy and gladneſs into my heart*, than the men of the world can have, *when their corn and their wine increaſeth.*

Many ſay, *lo here!* and *lo there!* that happineſs is in a great place, or in a plentiful eſtate, or in the enjoyment of ſenſual pleaſures and delights; but *believe them not*; happineſs is ſomething that is nearer and more intimate to us, than any of the things of this world; it is *within thee, in thine heart*, and in the very inward frame and diſpoſition of thy mind.

In a word, if ever we would be happy, we muſt be like the bleſſed God, we muſt be holy, and merciful, and good, and juſt, as he is, and then we are ſecure of his favour; for *the righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs, and his countenance will behold the upright.* Then we ſhall be qualified for the enjoyment of him, and take pleaſure in communion with him, becauſe we ſhall be like him. For the ſureſt foundation of love and friendſhip is a ſimilitude of temper and diſpoſition; every thing naturally affects its own likeneſs, and moves towards it, and greedily catcheth at it, and gladly runs into the embraces of it. God and man muſt be like one another, before they can take pleaſure in one another; if we be unlike to God, it is in the nature of the thing impoſſible

that we ſhould be happy in one another, and therefore there muſt be a change either in God or us, to bring about this likeneſs. The nature of God is inflexible, fixed and unchangeable; therefore change thyſelf, ſinner, and endeavour to be like God; for ſince he cannot depart from his holineſs and purity, thou muſt leave thy ſins, and *be holy as he is holy*, if ever thou hopeſt to be happy, as he is: *Every man that hath this hope in him*, muſt *purify himſelf, even as he is pure.*

Now to this happy and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, and dwelleth in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath ſeen, or can ſee; to him be honour and power everlaſting. Amen.

SERMON CXXXIII.

The unchangeableneſs of God.

JAMES i. 17.

With whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.

The whole period runs thus:

Do not err, my beloved brethren: Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.

THE connexion and dependence of theſe words upon the former is briefly this; the Apoſtle had aſſerted before, that God is not the author of ſin and evil, ver. 13, 14. *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with*

with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed: And here in the text he asserts, that God is the fountain and author of all good; *Do not err, my beloved brethren*; as if he had said, do not mistake me, though sin and evil be not from God, but from ourselves, and our own corrupt hearts; yet all good is from God, and not from ourselves: though we be the authors of the sins we commit, yet we are not so of the good that we do, that is from God; *Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.* Sin, which is nothing but evil and imperfection, is not from God, but wholly from ourselves; whatever is good and perfect, is not from ourselves, but from God; we are neither inclined to that which is good, nor are able of ourselves to perform it; both the inclination and the power are from God, who is the fountain of goodness and perfection, and can never be otherwise, and can never change nor cease to be so; *for with him is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.*

Every good gift, and every perfect gift; all that goodness, and all those degrees of perfection, which are in the creatures, in the highest Angels or saints, in the best of the sons of men, whatever there is of excellency and perfection, of goodness or happiness in any of them, *is from above*, that is from heaven; it is *the gift of God*, and *cometh down* from that perfect, good and glorious Being, whom the Apostle here calls *the Father of lights*; in allusion to the sun, which is a kind of universal benefactor to the world, and liberally dispenseth his light and heat and influence upon all things here below: but then there is this difference, the sun changeth its habitudes and positions in reference to us, and varies its shadows; it riseth and sets, comes nearer to us, and goes farther from us; but it is otherwise with this intellectual and immaterial Sun, *the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning*, παραλλαγὴ ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα, which are all astro-

nomical words; the first, παραλλαγὴ, signifies the various habitudes and positions wherein the sun appears to us every day, at its rising, in the meridian, and when it sets; τροπὴ is a word which belongs not to the daily, but to the yearly course of the sun, which is nearer to us, or farther from us, as he approacheth nearer towards the northern or southern tropicks; and hence it is that it casts several shadows to people in several countries; and agreeably to this, the word ἀποσκιάσμα, *casting of shadows*, being joined with τροπὴ, signifies the variation of the shadows according to the course and motion of the sun.

But God is an eternal spring of light, which never riseth nor sets, which hath no mixture of shadow nor darkness, hath no changes nor variations, but is always the same free and liberal dispenser of good things to his creatures; *the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning*; which words signify the immutable perfection and goodness of the divine nature; which shall (by God's assistance) be the subject of my present discourse; in which I shall proceed in this method:

First, I shall briefly explain what is meant by the immutability, or unchangeableness of the divine nature.

Secondly, I shall shew that this is a perfection essential to God, to be immutably what he is, that is, good and perfect.

Thirdly, I shall answer an objection which lies against it, from the mention so often made in scripture of *God's repenting himself*. And,

Fourthly, Apply the consideration of it to ourselves.

I. For the explication of it. By the immutability of God, we mean, that he always is, and was, and to all eternity will be the same; that he undergoes no changes either of his essence and being, or of his properties and perfections. In reference to the unchangeableness of his being, he is said to be *eternal, incorruptible, and only to have immortality*. In reference to his perfections, he is always the same infinitely wise, and good, and powerful, and holy, and

and juſt being; from whence it follows, that he is conſtant and immutable in all his decrees and counſels, his purpoſes and promiſes. We are uncertain and mutable in our very nature and beings, and in all thoſe qualities and perfections which belong to us, in all our purpoſes, reſolutions and actions; we are continually growing or decreaſing in this or that quality, and do frequently change from one extreme to another, from that which is more perfect, to the contrary; now knowing, and then ignorant; ſometimes wiſe, and oftner fooliſh, ſtronger and weaker, better or worſe, as it happens, and as we order ourſelves, continually waxing or waining in our knowledge, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and power; we frequently change our minds, and alter our purpoſes, and break our promiſes, and contradict our firmeſt and moſt ſerious reſolutions, and ſpeak a thing and do it not, ſay it, and do not bring it to paſs; but God is everlaſtingly the ſame in all his perfections, conſtant to his intentions, ſteady to his purpoſes, immutably fixed and perſevering in all his decrees and reſolutions. I proceed to the

Second thing I propoſed, namely, to ſhew that this perfection is eſſential to God, to be unchangeably what he is. And this I ſhall endeavour to make manifeſt both from natural reaſon, and from the divine revelation of the holy ſcriptures.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon, which tell us, that nothing argues greater weakneſs and imperfection than inconſtancy and change. This is the great vanity of all creatures, that they are uncertain, and do not long continue in one ſtate; this is the vanity of the world in general, that *the faſhion of it paſſeth away*; and of man in particular, that he is liable to ſo many natural changes, by age, and diſeaſes, and death; for which reaſon, he is ſaid by the Pſalmiſt, to be, *in his beſt eſtate, altogether vanity*; and that he is liable to ſo many moral changes, to be deluded and deceived in his underſtanding, and to alter his opinion ſo often, to be ſo fickle in his will, and to change ſo often his purpoſes and reſolutions,

lutions, according to the alteration or appearance of things. We attribute change and inconſtancy to perſons of the weakeſt age and underſtanding; as children, who are liable to be *toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every wind,* as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, Eph. iv. 14.

Now if the divine nature were ſubject to change, this would caſt an univerſal cloud upon all the divine perfections, and obſcure all other excellencies, and make them *like the flower of the field,* which, how gay and glorious ſoever, is fading and periſhing; and the greater the divine perfections are, the greater imperfection would mutability be; for as *the corruption of the beſt things is the worſt,* ſo the better any thing is, ſo much the worſe it would be to have it liable to corruption and change.

And as mutability in God would darken all his other perfections, ſo would it take away the foundation and comfort of all religion; the ground of our faith, and hope, and fear, of our love and eſteem of God, would be quite taken away. We could have no great honour or eſteem for a being that is fickle and inconſtant; if his power and juſtice were uncertain, his threatenings would in a great meaſure loſe their awe and force; if his truth and faithfulneſs could fail, no promiſes and declarations, how gracious ſoever, would be any ſecurity, or firm ground of truſt and confidence.

And this reaſoning is not the reſult of divine revelation, but clearly founded in the natural notions and ſuggeſtions of our minds, as will appear by citing one or two teſtimonies to this purpoſe, of thoſe who had no other guide but natural light. Plato, in his *Phædrus,* enquires, "Whether the moſt "perfect (that is God) be always the ſame, or ſome"times thus, and ſometimes otherwiſe? that is, "(ſaith he) Whether that which is equality and "goodneſs and bounty itſelf, receives any the leaſt "change at any time, and be not conſtant and u"niform, and of itſelf always the ſame, Καὶ ἴσαυτῶ "ἀδαμῶς ἀλλοῦσιν ἀδύνατον ἐνδέχεται. and is ne"ver in any wiſe, upon any account, ſubject to any "change

" change or alteration whatsoever?" To which he answers, " That it is necessary that he should be " the same and always alike." And *lib.* 2. *de Repub.* where he lays down the fundamental laws and constitutions of religion he mentions these two, (which, one would almost think, he borrowed from Saint James, but that he lived so long before him) *viz.* First, " That God is the cause of all good, and in " no wise of any evil:" answerably to what our Apostle here asserts, that *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but that every good and perfect gift is from him.* Secondly, " That " God doth not deceive us, by making various re- " presentations of himself to us; sometimes in one " form, and sometimes in another; for he is un- " changeable, and always the same, and cannot, " τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἰδέας ἐκβαίνειν, pass out of his own i- " dea, or be any other than what he is." Which he further confirms by this excellent reasoning, " That " which is the best and most perfect being is not " liable to any alteration; but such a being is God, " and therefore he cannot be changed by any thing " that is weaker and less perfect than himself, and " he cannot will to change himself; for if he should, " it must either be for the better, or for the worse: " It cannot be for the better; for being already " possessed of all perfection, there can be no acces- " sion of any to him by any change; and certainly " there is no wise being, as God is, that will change " for the worse;" and therefore he concludes, Κάλλιστος καὶ ἄριστος ὢν ἐς τὸ δυνατὸν μένει ἀεὶ ἁπλῶς καὶ τῇ αὑτοῦ μορφῇ, " That being the goodli- " est and best being that is possible, he always con- " tinues simply the same." Seneca likewise, speaking of the immutability of God's counsels, *lib.* 6. *De Benef. Stauerunt*, says he, *quæ non mutarunt, neque unquam primi consilii deos pœnitet*; " The gods " make such unchangeable decrees, and never re- " pent them of their first counsel."

2. This will yet more clearly appear from the divine revelation of the holy scriptures, which tell us,

us, that God is unchangeable in his nature and in his perfections, in all his decrees, and purpoſes, and promiſes: In his eſſence and being, Exod. iii. 14. *I am that I am*; this is his name, whereby he made known himſelf to the comfort of his people, and to the terror of the Egyptians their oppreſſors: Pſal. xc. 2. *From everlaſting to everlaſting thou art God*, Pſal. cii. 27. *Thou art the ſame, and thy years fail not*, Mal. iii. 6. *I am the Lord, and change not.* Hence it is that the title of *the living God* is ſo frequently attributed to him; and he ſwears by this, as denoting not only his eternity, but his unchangeableneſs; *As I live, ſaith the Lord.* Hither likewiſe we may refer thoſe texts where he is called the *incorruptible God*, Rom. i. 23. *The immortal king*, 1 Tim. i. 17. and is ſaid *only to have immortality*, 1 Tim. i. 16. And he is immutable likewiſe in his perfections; hence it is ſo often ſaid in the Pſalms, that *his goodneſs and his mercy endure for ever*; his righteouſneſs is likewiſe ſaid *to endure for ever.* Pſal. cxi. 3. and Pſal. xxxvi. 6. to be *like the great mountains*, not only viſible and conſpicuous, but firm and immoveable; and the ſame likewiſe is ſaid of his truth and faithfulneſs, Pſal. cxvii 2. *His truth endureth for ever*; and of his power, Iſaiah xxvi. 4. *In the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.*

And ſo likewiſe in his decrees and purpoſes, Pſal. xxxiii. 11. *The counſel of the Lord ſtandeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations.* Iſa. xiv. 24. *Surely as I have thought, ſo ſhall it come to paſs; and as I have purpoſed, ſo ſhall it ſtand.* Numb. xxiii. 19. *God is not a man, that he ſhould lie, neither the ſon of man that he ſhould repent: hath he ſpoken, and ſhall not he do it? hath he ſaid it, and ſhall not he bring it to paſs?* If he hath made any promiſe, or entered into any covenant with us, it is firm and immutable, Pſal. lxxxix. 33. *He will not ſuffer his faithfulneſs to fail, his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips.* His covenant and his promiſe are in themſelves immutable: But for our further aſſurance, God hath

hath given us his oath, the higheſt ſign of immutability; ſo the Apoſtle to the Hebrews tells us, chap. vi. 18. *That by two immutable things, (viz.* his promiſe and his oath) *in which it is impoſſible for God to lie, we might have ſtrong conſolation, who are fled for refuge to the hope which is ſet before us.* I proceed to the

III. Thing I propoſed, which is, To anſwer an objection, which may ſeem to lye againſt what hath been ſaid, from the mention ſo often made in ſcripture of *God's repenting himſelf*, as Gen. vi. 6. where it is ſaid, that *it repented God that he had made man.* 1 Sam. xv. 11. that *he repented that he had made Saul king.* And 2 Sam. xxiv. 16. when *the angel had ſtretched out his hand over Jeruſalem to deſtroy it*, it is ſaid, that *the Lord repented him of the evil.* And Pſal. cxxxv. 14. The Lord ſaith there, that *he will repent himſelf concerning his ſervants.*

To all which I anſwer, That this expreſſion of *God's repentance*, we are to underſtand (as many others in ſcripture) after the manner of men, and as ſpoken by way of condeſcenſion and accommodation to our weakneſs and capacity, and not as caſting any imputation of mutability and inconſtancy upon God; as if out of levity, or for want of foreſight, he did alter his mind: but when God is ſaid *to repent that he made man*, or *that he made Saul king*, the change was not in him, but them; and it ſignifies, not that God was abſolutely deceived in his expectation, but that things had fallen out contrary to all reaſonable expectation, and therefore the ſcripture clothes God with the human paſſion of repenting and grieving for what he hath done, as men uſe to do when they are greatly diſappointed and fall ſhort of their expectation.

And as for the other inſtances, wherein God is ſaid *to repent him of the evils threatned*; the expreſſion only ſignifies thus much, that God doth not execute that which ſeemed to us to have been his peremptory purpoſe and reſolution; that is, he is pleaſed to do otherwiſe than his threatenings ſeemed openly to expreſs, becauſe of ſome tacit condition

tion implied in it, which he did not think fit to acquaint us with. And this doth not at all derogate from the conſtancy and immutability of God: for when God did threaten, he ſpake what he did really purpoſe and intend, if ſomething did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened, upon which he was reſolved at that time when he threatened, to be taken off, and to ſtay his hand: and in thus doing, God doth not *mutare conſilium, ſed ſententiam; he doth not change his inward counſel and purpoſe, but takes off the ſentence,* which was paſſed with reſerved conditions, and unknown to us, on purpoſe to urge us the more effectually to repentance.

And that God uſually reſerves ſuch conditions, not only in his threatenings, but ſometimes alſo in his promiſes, appears from that remarkable text, Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. *At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy it; if that nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from the evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them: at what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my ſight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I ſaid I would benefit them.* And from this very conſideration, the ſame Prophet encourageth the people to repentance, Jer. xxvi. 13. *Therefore now amend your ways, and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent him of the evil he hath pronounced againſt you.* And we have a famous inſtance of this in the caſe of Nineveh, the deſtruction whereof within forty days after, God had openly proclaimed by his Prophet; yet he ſtops the execution of the ſentence, upon their repentance, Jonah iii. 10. *The men of Nineveh turned from their evil ways, and the Lord repented of the evil he ſaid he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

All that now remains, is to apply this doctrine of the immutability of the divine nature to ourſelves; and the conſideration of it may ſerve to ſeveral

veral good purpoſes, both in reference to bad and good men.

Firſt, In regard to ſinners and wicked men.

And, *Firſt*, The *unchangeableneſs of God* is matter of great terror to wicked men. Let but the ſinner conſider what God is, and the conſideration of his unchangeable nature muſt needs terrify him: *He is a holy God, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, Hab. i. 12. *He is not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with him: The fooliſh ſhall not ſtand in his ſight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity*, Pſal. v. 4, 5. *He is* likewiſe *a juſt God, and will by no means clear the guilty*, nor *let ſin go unpuniſhed*, Exod. xxxiv. 7. *He is alſo omnipotent*, and is able to execute the vengeance threatened againſt ſinners. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger?* Pſal. xc. 11. *Thou even thou art to be feared; and who may ſtand in in thy ſight when once thou art angry?* Pſal. lxxvi. 7. *Strong is the Lord who judgeth*, Rev. xviii. 8. And, which gives a ſad accent to all this, he that is thus holy, and juſt, and powerful, continues *for ever the ſame*, and will never alter or put off any of theſe properties, will never ceaſe to hate iniquity, and to be an implacable enemy to all impenitent ſinners: And is it not *a fearful thing to fall into the hands* of this holy, and juſt, and omnipotent God, who lives for ever, and can puniſh for ever? Let all obſtinate ſinners hear this, and tremble: You cannot be more obſtinately bent to continue in your wicked ways, than God is peremptorily reſolved to make you miſerable. If you be determined upon a ſinful courſe; God is alſo determined how he will deal with you, that *he will not ſpare*, but, *that his anger and jealouſy ſhall ſmoke againſt you*, and that *all the curſes that are written in his book ſhall light upon you*; and that *he will blot out your name from under heaven*; he hath *ſworn in his wrath, that* unbelieving and impenitent ſinners *ſhall not enter into his reſt*: And, for the greater aſſurance of the thing, and that we may not think

that there is any condition implied in theſe threatenings, he hath confirmed them by an oath; that by this immutable ſign, in which it is impoſſible for God to lie, ſinners might have ſtrong terrors, and not be able to fly to any, in hopes of refuge.

Secondly, The conſideration of God's *unchangeableneſs*, ſhould likewiſe be a very powerful argument to urge ſinners to repentance. If they will but leave their ſins, and turn to him, they will find him ready to receive them, upon their repentance and ſubmiſſion; for *he is a God gracious and merciful, ſlow to anger, and ready to forgive*; he is *unchangeably good*, and *his mercy endureth for ever*: but if they will not come in, and ſubmit to theſe terms, there is nothing before them but ruin and deſtruction; nothing then *remains but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, to conſume them.* God hath declared to us the terms of our pardon and peace; and if we will not come up to them, he is at a point, he cannot change his nature, nor will he alter the terms of his covenant. There is a perfect and eternal oppoſition between the holy nature of God, and an impenitent ſinner; and it is impoſſible ſuch an one ſhould be happy, till this oppoſition be removed; and to do that, there are but two ways imaginable, by changing God, or by changing ourſelves. The nature of God *is fixed and unalterable*; God cannot recede from his own pure nature; therefore we muſt depart from our ſinful and corrupt nature. God cannot quit his holineſs; therefore we muſt leave our ſins: we can have no hope to change God, therefore we muſt change ourſelves. Rectify, ſinner, thine own corrupt nature, and renounce thy luſts; do not venture upon impoſſibilities; rather think of altering thy ſinful nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, which is eſſentially immutable, *with whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.* God hath once condeſcended ſo far, as *to take our nature upon him*, to make us capable of happineſs: but if this will not do, he can go

no

no lower; he will not, he cannot *put off his own nature*, to make us happy.

Secondly, In reference to good men, the conſideration of God's *unchangeableneſs*, is matter of great conſolation to them; in all the changes and viciſſitudes of the world, their main comfort and hope is built upon a rock, *the rock of ages*, as the expreſſion is in the Prophet Iſaiah, chap. xxvi. 4. it relies upon the unchangeable goodneſs and faithfulneſs of God, *all whoſe promiſes are yea and amen*, truth and certainty. All other ſupports and hopes may fail us; but *God will not ſuffer his faithfulneſs to fail; his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of his lips*, as the Pſalmiſt aſſures, Pſal. lxxxix. 33. Men may break their word, and be leſs than their promiſes; but *God is faithful, who hath promiſed to give grace and glory, and to with-hold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. He is not a man, that he ſhould lie, neither the ſon of man, that he ſhould repent. Hath he ſpoken, and ſhall he not do it? Hath he ſaid it, and ſhall not he bring it to paſs?*

If there be any thing that hath the appearance of a change in God, it is uſually on the merciful ſide; as when he ſtops the execution of his threatnings upon the repentance of a ſinful nation; as in that remarkable text which I mentioned before, Jer. xviii. 7, 8. *At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy it; if that nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them:* And ſo likewiſe, when his faithful people and ſervants are in great diſtreſs, and there is no viſible help and means of relief; in this caſe likewiſe God is ſaid to repent, and to appear for their reſcue, Deut. xxxii. 36. *The Lord ſhall judge his people, and repent himſelf for his ſervants, when he ſeeth that their power is gone.*

Thus we ſhould comfort ourſelves in the greateſt extremities, with the conſideration of the immutable goodneſs and faithfulneſs of God. The things

of the world are mutable, and the men of the world, even thoſe things which ſeem moſt conſtant, as the heavens; and to be ſettled upon the ſureſt foundations, as the earth; yet theſe ſhall be changed, Pſal. cii. 25, 26, 27. *Of old haſt thou laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they ſhall periſh, but thou ſhalt endure; all of them ſhall wax old like a garment; as a veſture ſhalt thou change them, and they ſhall be changed: but thou art the ſame, and thy years ſhall have no end.* From whence the Pſalmiſt infers this comfort to the church and people of God, ver. 28. *The children of thy ſervants ſhall continue, and their ſeed ſhall be eſtabliſhed before thee.*

Nothing that is mutable can be a ſolid foundation of comfort and confidence. Men are inconſtant, and riches are uncertain, and all other things which men commonly truſt to; and therefore the Apoſtle *chargeth them that are rich in this world, not to truſt in uncertain riches, but in the living God.* He only that lives for ever, is a firm foundation of hope and confidence.

When God would comfort the Iſraelites in Egypt under their great oppreſſion, he bids Moſes only to declare to them his *immutability*. Exod. iii. 14. *Say unto them,* I AM THAT I AM *hath ſent me unto you.* And this is the great comfort of Chriſtians, that he who is their Saviour and their hope, is *the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever: he that was, and that is, and that is to come,* in all durations the ſame.

We are continually changing, and are not the ſame we were; ſome of us were young, and now are old; once, perhaps, flouriſhed in great proſperity, but now are poor and needy; were once ſtrong and healthful, but now ſickly and weak: It ſhould comfort us in all theſe changes, that *God is ſtill the ſame,* and he alone is inſtead of all other comforts and ſupports: when all other things fail, we may *rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our ſalvation.* Youth and health, and riches, and friends may forſake us; but God hath promiſed, that *he will*

he will never leave us, nor forſake us; that *he will not leave us when we are old, nor forſake us when our ſtrength faileth*; when *our ſtrength fails*, and *our heart fails*, then is he *the ſtrength of our hearts, and our portion for ever*; and when our great change ſhall come, and the terrors of death ſhall take hold of us, we have ſtill the ſame comfort, *the Lord liveth, and bleſſed be the God of our ſalvation.*

In a word, the conſideration of God's immutability, ſhould keep us fixed and unmoved in all the changes and accidents of this world, and not apt to be ſtartled and ſurpriſed at them, according to that of the Pſalmiſt, *He ſhall not be afraid of evil tidings, becauſe his heart is fixed, truſting in God.* This ſhould make us conſtant to him and his truth, *ſtedfaſt and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord*; *foraſmuch as we know that our labour ſhall not be in vain in the Lord*: it ſhould make us *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, in full aſſurance that God *will be as good to us as his word*, and in a firm hope and perſuaſion *of that eternal life which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed.*

SERMON CXXXIV.

The knowledge of God.

1 SAM. ii. 3.
The Lord is a God of knowledge.

The firſt ſermon on this text.

I Come now to ſpeak of thoſe properties and perfections which relate to the divine underſtanding, and will, and manner, and power of acting. Knowledge conſiders things abſolutely, and

in themſelves: Wiſdom conſiders the reſpects and relation of things one to another, and under the notion of means and ends. The knowledge of God is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, with all their powers and qualities, and circumſtances; the wiſdom of God is a perfect comprehenſion of the reſpects and relation of things one to another; of their harmony and oppoſition; of their fitneſs and unfitneſs to ſuch and ſuch ends. The knowledge of God only implies his bare underſtanding of things; but his wiſdom implies the skill of ordering and diſpoſing things to the beſt ends and purpoſes, to make every thing, and to govern and adminiſter all things in number, weight, and meaſure. I ſhall at preſent ſpeak of the *firſt* of theſe, the knowledge of God; which, as I ſaid, is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, and of every thing belonging to their nature: of the powers, and qualities, and circumſtances of things.

Theſe words ſignify God to be the fountain of knowledge; that is, that he poſſeſſeth it himſelf, and communicates it to others. In the handling of this I ſhall,

Firſt, Endeavour to prove, that this attribute belongs to God.

Secondly, Shew the perfection and the prerogatives of the divine knowledge.

Thirdly, Draw ſome practical inferences from the whole.

Firſt, For the proof of it, I ſhall attempt it two ways:

1. From the dictates of natural light and reaſon.
2. From ſcripture or divine revelation.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reaſon. I begin with this firſt; becauſe, unleſs this be eſtabliſhed, all divine revelation falls to the ground; unleſs natural reaſon aſſures us, that God is endowed with knowledge and underſtanding, it is in vain to enquire after divine revelation. For to make any revelation credible, two things are requiſite on the part of the revealer, ability and integrity; that he have a perfect knowledge and underſtanding of the thing

thing which he reveals, ſo that he cannot be deceived himſelf; and ſo much goodneſs and truth, that he will not deceive us. Now unleſs our reaſon aſſures us, that God is endowed with knowledge and underſtanding, the firſt condition is evidently wanting, *viz.* ability, and conſequently the ſecond, integrity; for there cannot be goodneſs and veracity without knowledge.

This being premiſed, I proceed to the proof of it, from ſuch arguments as our natural reaſon ſuggeſts to us. I have formerly told you, that the divine perfections are not to be proved by way of demonſtration, but by way of conviction, by ſhewing the abſurdities and inconveniencies of the contrary; for if we deny knowledge to God, we muſt deny it to be a perfection; we muſt deny it to be in any of the creatures; we muſt attribute many other imperfections to God; all which are abſurd to our natural reaſon; for natural reaſon dictates to us, that knowledge is a perfection, that it is to be found in the creatures, and that the denial of it to God will argue many other imperfections in the divine nature; now theſe are ſo many arguments which natural reaſon offers to us to prove, that *knowledge belongs to God.*

1. It is a perfection, and therefore belongs to God. Natural reaſon tells us, though the ſcripture had not ſaid it, that *knowledge excells ignorance, as much as light doth darkneſs*; now whatever is perfect and excellent is to be attributed to the divine nature; for this is the firſt notion we have of God, that he is *a being abſolutely perfect.*

2. Knowledge is to be found in ſome of the creatures, and therefore is much more in God the Creator, becauſe it is derived from him. Our very underſtandings whereby we know God, or any thing elſe, are an argument that knowledge and underſtanding are in God. If *he gives wiſdom to the wiſe, and knowledge to them that know underſtanding,* if he communicates this perfection to the creatures, he himſelf is much more poſſeſſed of it. The ſcripture

pture indeed uſeth this argument, but I mention it as that which natural reaſon doth ſuggeſt to the moſt brutiſh and ignorant of men. Pſal. xciv. 8, 9, 10. *Underſtand, ye brutiſh among the people; and ye fools when will ye be wiſe? He that planted the ear, ſhall he not hear? He that formed the eye, ſhall he not ſee?*

3. The denial of this perfection to God, argues many other imperfections in the divine nature. Nothing would more eclipſe the divine nature, than to take away this perfection from it; this would bring an univerſal obſcurity upon God's other perfections; this would be to put out the light of heaven, and to turn *the brightneſs of the morning into the ſhadow of death.* If we remove this perfection from God, we deny his wiſdom. He that does not know the nature and qualities of things, cannot know how to apply means to ends, to fit or ſuit one thing to another: And we weaken his power. What an impotent and ineffectual thing would power be without knowledge? What irregular things would it produce? What untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power were let looſe to act without the conduct of knowledge and underſtanding? And, conſequently, we take away his providence; for without knowledge, there can be no counſel, no forecaſt of events, no proviſion for the future, no government of the world. And this is not all; for without knowledge there could be no ſuch thing as goodneſs; for he is not good that does good out of ignorance, or from a blind neceſſity. There could be no veracity, nor juſtice, nor mercy in God; for all theſe ſuppoſe knowledge. He that ſpeaks truth, muſt know it; he that is juſt, muſt underſtand right from wrong; he that ſhews mercy, muſt know who are miſerable, and how they may be relieved: and, not to labour in a thing ſo plain and eaſy, take away the knowledge of God, and you render him incapable of any honour from his creatures; for if we know not what honour we do him, it is loſt labour to give him any. And that

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we may ſee theſe are the deductions of natural reaſon, without the advantage of revelation, we ſhall find the Heathen, who were deſtitute of divine revelation, did attribute this perfection to God. Tully tells us, that Thales was wont to ſay, *Deos omnia cernere*; and we know the Heathen were wont to ſwear, *Diis immortalibus teſtibus interpoſitis*, which is an owning of his omniſcience: *Quis enim non timeat Deum omnia pervidentem, & cogitantem, & animadvertentem, curioſum & negotii plenum Deum?* De nat. deor. l. 1.

2. From ſcripture and divine revelation. I will not heap up all thoſe teſtimonies of ſcripture, which might be gathered together upon this argument; I will only inſtance in two or three: Job xxxvi. 4. *He that is perfect in knowledge, is with thee.* — xxxvii. 16. *Doſt thou know the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?*

Hither we may refer thoſe texts which repreſent God by way of condeſcenſion to our infirmity, as having eyes and ears, which ſignify his knowledge of what is done in the world; and thoſe which ſpeak of him, as communicating to us all the knowledge which we have; *he giveth wiſdom to the wiſe, and underſtanding to them that know underſtanding*, Dan. ii. 21. And thoſe which ſpeak of God, as knowing the moſt ſecret things, *the hidden things of darkneſs*, the hearts and the thoughts of men; and thoſe things which are at the greateſt diſtance, as future things; and of the greateſt uncertainty, as the contingent acts of free creatures; each of theſe I ſhall particularly conſider; for in proving that God knows all theſe, his knowledge of all other things will be proved with advantage: for if any thing be out of the reach of the divine underſtanding, it muſt in all probability be either thoſe things which are ſecret and hidden, as mens ſecret actions, or their thoughts; or elſe thoſe things which are to come, and depend upon no certain cauſe, as future contingencies: and the proving of this may be of great uſe to us, as having a great influence upon practice; it tends very much to the advancement of religion,

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and the good government of our lives. I begin with the

First of these, *viz.* That God takes very exact and particular notice of all the actions of men, even those that are most secret. And in the handling of this, I shall speak distinctly to these three things:

1. That God takes knowledge of all our actions: *his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings*, Job. xxxiv. 21.

2. That he is a curious observer of them; *he seeth all his goings, he marks all his steps*, takes very exact and particular notice of all that we do.

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden; *there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves*, Job xxxiv. 22.

1. That God takes notice of all our actions. And that this notion was planted in the mind of man, and a beam of the light which comes with us into the world, will appear by the general agreement of heathens in it. I will but produce one or two testimonies to this purpose. Tully lays down this principle, as that which makes men regular and orderly, and fit for society; *Sit igitur hoc persuasum civibus, qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat deos intueri.* Socrates, as Xenophon tells us, was wont to say, πάντα θεοὺς εἰδέναι τά τε λεγόμενα καὶ πραττόμενα καὶ τὰ σιγῇ βουλευόμενα. Arrian in his discourse upon Epictetus, tells us, it is necessary that every one should be persuaded of this, ὅτι ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐφορᾶται ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, *that every thing that is done by men is seen of God.*

The scripture frequently mentions this, Psal. cxxxix. 1, *&c.* Prov. v. 21. *The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.* Jer. xxxii. 19. *Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

2. He is a curious observer, one that takes exact notice of all that we do. Job saith, *he seeth all our steps*; and Solomon, *that he pondereth all our goings*;

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the word is, *he weighs them in a balance.* So 1 Sam. ii. 3. *The Lord is a God of knowledge, by him actions are weighed.* Job xxxi. 4. *Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps?* Which doth not imply the difficulty, but the perfection and exactness of God's knowledge; he knows the quality of our actions, and all the circumstances of them, all the degrees of good and evil that are in them, whatever may commend an action or blemish it, whatever may aggranate a sin or excuse it. Isa. 26. 7. *Thou most upright dost weigh the path of the just.* There is not a good word that we speak, but God hears it, Mal. iii. 16. *And the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him*; and all that we do is *noted in his book*, Psal. lvi. 8.

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden, the good as well as bad; when we *do our alms in secret*, when we *enter into our closets and shut the doors, our Father seeth in secret*, Mat. vi. Nor can we retire ourselves to any place, where we can sin so as God shall not see us, where we can hide our sins from his sight, or ourselves from his wrath. Hear how sensibly a heathen speaks of this; ὅταν κλείσητε τὰς θύρας, καὶ σκότῳ ἔνδον ποιήσητε, μέμνησθε μηδέποτε λέγειν ὅτι μόνος εἰμί, ἐ γὰρ ἔσε. ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἔνδον ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ ὑμέτερος δαίμων ἐστὶ, καὶ τίς τούτοις χρεία φωτὸς, εἰς τὸ βλέπειν τί ποιεῖτε; Arrian in Ep. l. 1. c. 14.

The scripture is full of testimonies to this purpose, Psal. xc. 8. *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance*; those sins which we commit in the dark are in the light of the divine knowledge; *darkness and light are all one to him*; Psal. cxxxix. 11, 12: Jer. xvi. 17. xxiii. 24. *Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him.*

II. God knows the hearts and thoughts of men; which implies these two things:

First, His perfect knowledge of them.

Secondly, That this is his peculiar prerogative.

First, God perfectly knows the hearts of men, Jer. xvii. 10. *I the Lord search the heart, and try*

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the reins; where, by *heart and reins*, which are the moſt inward parts of the body, and ly leaſt open to diſcovery, are ſignified the moſt ſecret thoughts and motions of the ſoul; theſe God is ſaid to *ſearch* and *try*, not as if it were a work of labour and difficulty to the divine knowledge to penetrate the hearts of men, and to dive into their thoughts, but to ſignify to us the perfection and exactneſs of the divine knowledge; as when men would know a thing exactly, they ſearch into every part of it, and examine every thing narrowly; ſo God is ſaid *to ſearch the heart*, to ſignify to us that he knows the hearts of men as thoroughly as we do any thing upon the ſtricteſt ſearch and moſt diligent examination; upon the ſame account he is ſaid elſewhere in ſcripture *to weigh the ſpirits of men*, Prov. xvi. 2. *All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth his ſpirits*; that is, he hath as perfect a knowledge of the ſecret motions and inclinations of mens hearts, as men have of thoſe things which they weigh in a balance, with the greateſt exactneſs.

Now that God hath this perfect knowledge of mens hearts, the ſcripture frequently declares to us; that he knows the hearts of all men, 1 Kings viii. 39. *For thou, even thou, knoweſt the hearts of all the children of men*, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. *The Lord ſearcheth all hearts, and underſtandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.* How cloſe and reſerved ſoever men may be, what diſguiſe ſoever they may uſe to hide their purpoſes from men, yet God ſees them; the things which are moſt dark and ſecret are open to his view. Pſal. xliv. 21. *He knoweth the ſecrets of the hearts.* Prov. xv. 11. *Hell and deſtruction are before him, how much more the hearts of the children of men?* Whatever pretences men may make, God ſees through them, and diſcovers the very intentions of their hearts. Pſal. vii. 9. *The righteous Lord trieth the heart and reins.* Heb. iv. 13. It is ſaid there of *the word of God*, that it is *a diſcerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart; for all things are naked, and open to the eye of him with*

with whom we have to do, and there is no creature that is not manifeſt in his ſight; nay, he knows our thoughts at a diſtance, what they will be, before they actually are. Pſal. cxxxix. 2. *Thou knoweſt my thoughts afar off.* It is true indeed every man is conſcious to his own thoughts, and privy to the motions of his own mind, when they are preſent, and when they are paſt, if he have not forgot them; but no man knows what he ſhall think to-morrow; but this God knows; for he knows us more intimately and thoroughly than we do ourſelves; *God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things*, 1 John iii. 20.

And though the ſcripture had not revealed this ſo plainly, yet we had not been wholly ignorant of it; it is a principle implanted in us, and born with us, as being part of that natural notion which men have of God; the reaſon of our minds tells us, that God knows our hearts; and the fears and jealouſies of our minds are an evidence of it.

Firſt, The reaſon of every man's mind tells him, that the ſupreme Being whom we call God, is endued with all perfection, and among his other perfections, that *he excells in knowledge*; and to the perfection of knowledge it is required, that it extend itſelf to all objects, and that nothing be exempted from it. The knowledge of God, in reſpect of all objects, is like the ſun in reſpect of this lower world; *nothing is hid from the light of it.* We have naturally this apprehenſion of God, that he is an immenſe Being, every where preſent; that he intimately penetrates all places and things, and conſequently that he is preſent to our ſpirits, and ſees all the motions of our minds, and diſcerns the very ſecrets of our hearts; and there can be no ſuch thing as ſecrecy and retirement from an eye that is every where, and a knowledge that pierceth into all things.

And to convince us that theſe are the dictates of natural reaſon, without the help and aſſiſtance of divine revelation, we ſhall find that the heathen, who had only the advantage of natural light, were

firmly poſſeſſed with this apprehenſion, that God knows the hearts of men. This may be ſufficiently collected from the frequent ſayings of the wiſer heathens to this purpoſe; that the beſt and moſt acceptable worſhip of the Deity is that which is inward, that of the heart and mind. To this ſenſe, Tully ſpeaks, *Cultus autem deorum eſt optimus, idemque caſtiſſimus atque ſanctiſſimus pleniſſimuſque pietatis, ut eos ſemper purâ, integrâ atque incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur*; "The beſt and holieſt worſhip "of the gods, is to worſhip them with a pure, and "upright, and ſincere mind." To the ſame purpoſe is that known ſaying of the Poet:

Compoſitum jus faſque animi, ſanctoſque receſſus
Mentis, & incoctum generoſo pectus honeſto,
Hac cedo ut admoveam templis, & farre litabo.

"Do but offer to God a mind inwardly reſolved to "be juſt and honeſt, and the plaineſt ſacrifice will "pleaſe him." Now from hence, that they judged the purity of our hearts and thoughts, and an honeſt diſpoſition of mind, to be moſt acceptable to their gods, we may certainly conclude, that they did moſt firmly believe that God knows the ſecrets of mens hearts, otherwiſe there had been no need for men to endeavour to recommend themſelves this way to the divine acceptance.

But we need not argue this by conſequence; there are many expreſs paſſages in their writings, which do ſufficiently ſignify their belief of this principle. Thales, one of their moſt ancient Philoſophers, being asked, *If an unjuſt man could conceal himſelf from God?* He anſwered, *he cannot ſo much as hide from him the very thoughts and deſign of it.* Socrates (as Xenophon tells) was wont to inculcate this principle upon his ſcholars, That *the gods know all things, what we ſay, and what we do, and what we think in ſilence.* To the ſame purpoſe, Arrian in his diſſertations upon Epictetus, laying down the principles of a virtuous life; *Firſt of all*, ſaith he, *we muſt learn this, that there is a God who takes care of the world, and that*

that there is nothing hid from him, not only what we do, but even what we think and design. So likewise Tully, in his book of laws; *Let every man be firmly perſuaded of this; that the gods ſee what every man is, and with what mind and devotion they ſerve them.* I will add but one teſtimony more, and that is of Seneca in his epiſtles; *Nihil Deo clauſum eſt, intereſt animis noſtris, & cogitationibus mediis intervenit*; "We can keep nothing cloſe from God, for "he is preſent to our minds, and intimate to our "thoughts;" ſo that you ſee this principle is deeply rooted in the minds of men, and that men do naturally reaſon themſelves into it.

(2.) The natural fears of men are likewiſe a ſecret acknowledgment of this; and I take this to be a great truth, that a man's natural actions, and ſuch as happen upon ſurprize, and without deliberation, are a better argument of the intimate ſenſe of our minds, and do more truly diſcover what lies at the bottom of our hearts, and what notions are natural to us, than our contrived and deliberate diſcourſe. If I ſee a man, upon the ſudden ſight of a ſerpent, recoil and ſtart back, though he tell me never ſo often that he is not afraid, yet I am ſufficiently convinced of the contrary, becauſe I ſee in his countenance and carriage a natural acknowledgment of fear and danger; ſo if men find that upon the deſigning of a ſecret wickedneſs, which never went further than their own hearts, their conſciences do ſting and laſh them; that they have a ſenſe of guilt, and feel inward frights and horrors, whatever they may ſay to the contrary; this is a natural acknowledgment of an inviſible eye that ſees them, and diſallows their wicked deſigns. If that be true which the heathen Poet ſays, That

Scelus intra ſe tacitum qui cogitat ullum,
Facti crimen habet.

"He that meditates any ſecret wickedneſs in his heart, "is guilty to himſelf, as if he had committed it;" this is a plain confeſſion, that the man ſtands in awe of ſome-

thing beſides himſelf, and is jealous that there is one that is conſcious to what he thinks.

(2.) That to have a perfect and thorough knowledge of mens hearts, is the peculiar prerogative of God. This is implied in the anſwer to that queſtion, *Who can know the heart of man?* Jer. xvii. 10. *I the Lord ſearch the heart, and try the reins*; this is the prerogative of God, and one of his chief titles, that he is καρδιογνώστης, *a knower of the heart*, 1 Kings viii. 39. *Thou, even thou only knoweſt the hearts of all the children of men.* Men may make a probable conjecture at the thoughts and deſigns of others, from their words and actions; but God only knows them. Men are conſcious to their own thoughts and purpoſes; *the ſpirit of a man that is in him, knows the things of a man*; but they cannot ſee into the ſecrets of another man's mind; it is God alone that knows the hearts of all men; the heart of a man is a privileged place, and the ſecret and inward workings of it are not ſubject to the cognizance of any but God alone. The limits of human knowledge are the outward appearances of actions, 1 Sam. xvi. 7. *The Lord ſeeth not as man ſeeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart*; our knowledge is but ſuperficial, and glides upon the outſide and ſurface of things, but the divine knowledge pierceth to the very center of every thing. Now the darkeſt place, the moſt inward retirement, the privateſt cloſet in the whole world, is the heart of man, and this God only is privy to; *Deus auctor omnium & ſpeculator omnium, à quo nihil ſecretum eſſe poteſt, tenebris intereſt, & cogitationibus noſtris quaſi alteris tenebris*, ſaith Min. Felix. *God made all things, and ſees all things, and therefore nothing can be ſecret from him; he is preſent in darkneſs, and he is preſent to the thoughts of men, which are as it were another* and a thicker *darkneſs.*

The Devil indeed pretends to this knowledge; he would take upon him to know the integrity of Job's heart better than God himſelf; and that notwithſtanding the teſtimony which God gave of his integrity; yet if he were but ſoundly tried by affliction, he

he would renounce God, and curſe him to his face: but the event proved how groundleſs and malicious this ſuggeſtion was. But there is a far greater difficulty in this matter, from the paſſages of ſome Divines concerning the Devil's immediate acceſs to the minds of men, and his power to caſt wicked thoughts into them; which ſeems by conſequence to grant him ſome knowledge of mens hearts; for by the ſame reaſon that he can imprint thoughts upon mens minds, he may ſee thoſe that are imprinted there.

That the Devil is a very ſagacious ſpirit, and can make very ſhrewd conjectures at the bent and inclinations of mens minds, and the probable workings of our thoughts, from a general knowledge and obſervation of our tempers and paſſions, of our intereſts and deſigns, and from the general tenour of our actions in publick and private, and from our prayers and confeſſions to God, (if he permit him at any time to be ſo near good men) I think there is no doubt: But this is far from a knowledge of our hearts; all this is but conjecture, and ſuch as men may make of one another in a lower degree.

But as to the buſineſs of caſting blaſphemous and deſpairing thoughts into the minds of men; to this I would ſay theſe three things:

1. That there are few of theſe caſes which may not more probably be reſolved into the wickedneſs and infidelity of mens hearts, or into the darkneſs and melancholy of our tempers, which are apt to raiſe and ſuggeſt ſtrange thoughts to men, and ſuch as we may be apt to think have no riſe from ourſelves, not conſidering what an odd and ſtrange influence the diſorder of our bodily humours may have upon our minds, as we ſee in violent fevers, and ſeveral other diſeaſes; and melancholy, though the workings of it are more ſtill and quiet, is as truly a diſeaſe as any other; ſo that I chuſe rather to aſcribe as much of theſe to a bodily diſtemper as may be, becauſe it is a very uncomfortable conſideration, to think that the Devil hath ſuch an immediate power upon the minds of men.

2. I do not see how by any means it can be granted, without prejudice to this prerogative of God, which the scripture plainly gives him, of *being the only knower of the heart*, that the Devil can have so immediate an access to our minds, as to put wicked thoughts into them; nor can I think, that when it is said, 1 Chron. xxi. 1. that *Satan provoked David to number the people*, and Luke xxii. 3. that *the Devil entered into Judas*, and Acts v. 3. that *Satan had filled the heart of Ananias, to lie unto the Holy Ghost*, and Eph. ii. 2. that *the Devil is the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*; I say, I cannot think that any, or all of these expressions do amount to such an immediate power of putting wicked thoughts into mens minds; but they only signify that the Devil hath a greater hand in some sins than others, and that a heart wickedly bent and inclined, gives him a great advantage to tempt men more powerfully by presenting the occasions of such wicked thoughts and actions to them; for it is usual in scripture phrase, as to ascribe all good motions to God's Spirit, so all evil thoughts and actions to the Devil, not that he is the immediate cause of them, but because he is always ready to tempt men to them, and one way or other to promote them.

3. I see no reason to grant (as many have done) an immediate power to the Devil over the fancies and imaginations of men, and that he may know the workings of them, though not the secret thoughts of mens minds; for this seems to me to be in effect to grant him the knowledge of mens hearts, and to give him a key to that closet which God hath reserved to himself; for it is a very nice distinction which is here made between the thoughts of mens minds, and the images of their fancies; and if these should happen to be but words that signify the same thing, we shall unawares intrench upon the prerogative of God. Therefore because the scripture is a stranger to these nice and subtile distinctions between the imaginations of the fancy, and the thoughts of the heart, I think it is much safer to assert the prerogative

tive of God in that latitude that the ſcripture uſeth the word *heart*, for all the inward motions of the mind, for the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and roundly to affirm that all the inward motions of our ſouls are totally exempted from the immediate cognizance of any other ſpirit but God's alone; and that neither Angel nor Devil hath any further knowledge of them, than may be collected and inferred in a way of probable conjecture from the particular knowledge of mens tempers, and habits, and deſigns, and the courſe of their actions. I proceed to the

III. Particular; God's knowledge of future events. This God propoſes as the way to diſcern the true God from idols, Iſai. xli. 21, &c. *Produce your cauſe, ſaith the Lord, bring forth your ſtrong reaſons, ſaith the King of Jacob*; that is, let them bring ſome argument that may convince us that they are gods; and he inſtanceth in foretelling future events, ver. 22. *Let them ſhew the former things, what they be, that we may conſider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods.* God puts it upon this iſſue, if they can *foretel future things*, then they are *gods*; if not, they are *vanity, and a work of naught, and he is an abomination that chooſeth them*, ver. 24. By *things to come*, I underſtand ſuch effects as do not depend upon any neceſſary cauſe, but upon the will of free agents, and ſo may be, or may not be; from whence it is plain, that it is the prerogative of God, proper and peculiar to him, to know future events. And here I ſhall conſider theſe two things:

1. That God knows future events.
2. That he only knows them.

1. God knows future events; which will appear from the dictates of natural light, and from ſcripture.

(1.) From the dictates of natural light; as it is a perfection, and that which among men is accounted the beſt part of wiſdom; and unleſs this did belong to God, how could he govern the world? The Heathens

thens, except only the Epicureans, generally granted this, as appears in thoſe wiſe counſels, which we frequently meet with in them to this purpoſe, that we ſhould not be anxious for the future; but having done our endeavour, leave the events of things to God, who only knows them and diſpoſeth them.

Permittes ipſis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebuſque ſit utile noſtris. Juv.

And afterward ſaith he, *We are importunate with God for wife and children:* ——*At illis*
Notum, qui pueri, qualiſque futura ſit uxor.

And that this was their opinion, appears yet more clearly from thoſe apprehenſions which they had of divination. Tully lays down this for a principle, *Deos poſſe nobis ſigna futurarum rerum oſtendere*; de legibus. And in his book *de divin.* he tells us, *that there was ſuch a thing as divination; for it was an old opinion, Jam uſque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque pop. Rom. & omnium gentium firmata conſenſu:* and afterward that *this divination was not, ſine inſtinctu afflatúque divino.*

I know they did variouſly explain this, according to their ſeveral opinions about fate and contingency, and their apprehenſions about the providence of God. One ſect of them, the Stoicks, held that there was a fatal chain of cauſes from firſt to laſt, and things did neceſſarily follow one another; and by this means they made fore-knowledge eaſy and explicable; and though in their diſputes they ſeem to grant no ſuch things as events and contingencies, yet they are agreed in the thing, that thoſe things which we call events, though they would not call them ſo, were fore-known to God. And for this I ſhall only cite one teſtimony of Seneca, ſpeaking of God's fore-knowledge of the moſt contingent things, the diſpoſitions of men long before they are born; he adds, *nota eſt enim illis operis ſui ſeries, omniúmque illis rerum per manus ſuas iturarum ſcientia in aperto ſemper eſt; nobis ex abdito ſubit; & quæ repentina putamus, illis proviſa veniunt & familiaria;* and how

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peremptory ſoever this ſect is in their diſputes about fate, yet when they ſpeak of the τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν, and generally in their moral diſcourſes, they ſeem plainly to me to exempt the will of man from this fatal neceſſity.

And thoſe other ſects of the Philoſophers that denied fate, did generally grant God's fore-knowledge of contingent things. I grant indeed, that they did rather make God's fore-knowledge an arbitrary and voluntary, than a neceſſary perfection, that is, that God, when he pleaſed to apply himſelf to it, could fore-know all future events: but their general opinion was, that as his providence did not extend to ſmall and inconſiderable things, ſo neither his fore-knowledge. But Tully ſeems to attribute a very perfect providence to, and a fore-knowledge of the leaſt things, *Quis non timeat omnia providentem, cogitantem, animadvertentem, & omnia ad ſe pertinere putantem, curioſum & negotii plenum Deum?* But I cannot ſay he is conſtant to himſelf: but they all agree in granting to him this perfection of knowing all future things, if he be pleaſed to trouble himſelf with it; and had they not in this miſtaken the nature of God, they might eaſily have apprehended that it is no trouble nor wearineſs to an infinite underſtanding, that is always in act, to know the leaſt things how many ſoever they be.

2. From ſcripture, which gives us teſtimonies and arguments of it.

(1.) Teſtimonies, Iſa. xlviii. 3, &c. Acts xv. 18: *Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world, ἀπ' αἰῶνος, from everlaſting*; which by the way I cannot but compare with the forecited place of *Seneca, Nota enim illis operis ſui ſeries*, &c.

(2.) By arguments from ſcripture, I will mention but one; the clear and particular predictions of future events long before they happened, Gen. xv. 13. God foretells the children of Iſrael's deliverance after 430 years, which he punctually accompliſhed, Exod. xii. 40, 41. The Prophet that prophe-

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fied againſt the altar at Bethel, named the man that ſhould do it, Joſias, 350 years before-hand, 1 Kings xiii. 2. The deliverance of the children of Iſrael from the Babyloniſh captivity was foretold an hundred before, to be done particularly by Cyrus; which is ſo ſtrange, that the Prophet brings it in with a preface of God's wiſdom and power, Iſa. xliv. 24. &c. which was afterward preciſely fulfilled, when the ſeventy years were expired. How are the life and death of the Meſſias, with many particular circumſtances foretold? and did not he foretel the deſtruction of Jeruſalem forty years before?

But becauſe there may be no contingency in good things, God himſelf may be reſolved to effect them, or excite men to do them, when he hath foretold them; you ſhall find that the worſt things have been foretold; the apoſtacy of the children of Iſrael, Deut. xxxi. 16. and their infidelity in times of the goſpel, Iſa. liii, 1, 5, 9. 26. Our Saviour foretold the treachery of Judas and Peter's denial of him; now theſe are ſo evil, that it were blaſphemy to ſuppoſe the holy God to have any hand in them; and therefore are foretold by him merely by virtue of his fore-knowledge, and the infiniteneſs of his underſtanding, which reacheth things at the greateſt diſtance, that are moſt contingent.

SER-

SERMON CXXXV.

Of the knowledge of God.

1 Sam. ii. 3.

The Lord is a God of knowledge.

The ſecond ſermon on this text.

I Have conſidered this perfection of God, in ſome of the greateſt and moſt difficult inſtances of it, his knowledge of the moſt ſecret things, the hearts of men, and future events; againſt the laſt of which there are ſome objections, which I come now briefly to conſider, and paſs on to what remains.

Objection the *firſt*; The impoſſibility of the thing. The certainty of all knowledge depends upon the certainty of the object; therefore there cannot be a certain and determinate knowledge of any thing, but what is certainly and determinately true: but future events, which may, or may not be, have no certain and determinate truth, that is, it is not certain either that they will or will not be; becauſe they have no certain cauſe: therefore there can be no infallible knowledge concerning them.

Anſ. This I confeſs is the grand difficulty; I ſhall not be ſo ſolicitous to take it away, as to give ſatisfaction to it.

1. I might ſay, with a very fair probability, that the certainty of knowledge doth not depend upon the certainty of the cauſe, but of the object, which may be certain, though the cauſe be contingent. Which I prove thus; whatever event hath actually happened, as becauſe now it is paſt, it is certainly true, that it was; ſo becauſe it once was, it was cer-

certainly true before it was, that it would be, as in Peter's denying of Christ. If it be now true, that he hath denied him, it was true before, that he would deny him; and it being determinately true; God saw it as it was; so that here is an object of a certain knowledge.

2. Though we could not explain the possibility of God's knowing future contingencies, much less the manner how; yet we are sufficiently assured that God doth know them. I will give but one instance for the proof this. Nothing more evident than the sin of Adam; yet God foreknew this, how else was Christ *decreed before the foundation of the world?* Christ was a remedy upon the occasion of sin; now the remedy could not be designed before the sin was foreseen: and this being certain, *cùm constat de re, fruſtra inquiritur de modo; when we are certain of the thing, 'tis not neceſſary to know the manner.* We are satisfied of many things, the manner whereof we do not know: we believe the union of the soul and body, though no man can explain how a spirit can be united to matter; we believe the continuity of matter, that is, that the parts of it hang together, of which whosoever saith he can give an account, doth but betray his own ignorance. And so in many other things; that man doth not know himself, nor the measure of his own understanding, nor the nature and obscurity of things, that will not confess himself posed in many things, that doth not acknowledge that there are many ἀφανίσεα, many things, the manner whereof is unimaginable, and of which our best reason and understanding can give no account.

3. It is very unreasonable to expect we should know all the ways which infinite knowledge hath of knowing things. We have but finite faculties and measures, which bear no proportion to infinite powers and objects. Could we explain the manner how infinite knowledge knows things, we should be *like God in knowledge*, our understandings would be infinite like his; and in this case

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eſpecially it becomes us to put on the modeſty of creatures, and to remember that we are finite and limited. Some arrogant ſpirits take it for an affront to their underſtandings, that any one ſhould expect they ſhould believe any thing, though they have the higheſt aſſurance of it, if they cannot explain the particular manner of it; they make nothing to deny God's knowledge of future events, unleſs they may be ſatisfied of the particular way how he knows them.

I know there are thoſe who undertake to explain the particular manner. Some ſay, that God ſees future events *in ſpeculo voluntatis*; others ſay, that the eternity of God is actually commenſurate to all duration, as his immenſity to all ſpace, and ſo God doth not ſo properly foreſee and foreknow as ſee and know future things by the preſentiality and co-exiſtence of all things in all eternity; for they ſay, that future things are actually preſent and exiſting to God, though not in *menſurâ propriâ*, yet in *menſurâ alienâ*. The ſchoolmen have much more of this jargon and canting language; and I envy no man the underſtanding theſe phraſes; but to me they ſeem to ſignify nothing, but to have been words invented by idle and conceited men, which a great many ever ſince, leſt they ſhould ſeem to be ignorant, would ſeem to underſtand; but I wonder moſt, that men, when they have amuſed and puzzled themſelves and others with hard words, ſhould call this explaining things.

The ſum of the anſwer is this; that when we have done all we can, God's foreknowledge of future events may ſeem contradictious and impoſſible to us; much leſs do I expect ever to be able to give a particular account of the manner of it: but we have ſufficient aſſurance of the thing, and unleſs we had infinite underſtandings, it were vanity to pretend to explain all the ways of infinite knowledge.

Secondly, It is objected, That if we can admit ſuch a knowledge in God as ſeems contradictious and impoſſible to our reaſon, why may we not allow and

frame ſuch notions of his goodneſs and juſtice?

To this I anſwer, There is a great difference between thoſe perfections of God which are imitable, and thoſe which are not. Knowledge of future events is a perfection wherein we are not bound to be like God; and if we are aſſured of the thing that he doth know them, it is not neceſſary that we ſhould know the manner of it, and diſentangle it from contradiction and impoſſibility: But it is otherwiſe in God's goodneſs and juſtice, which are imitable; he that imitates, endeavours to be like ſomething that he knows, and we muſt have a clear idea and notion of that which we would bring ourſelves to the likeneſs of; theſe perfections of God we are capable of knowing, and therefore the knowledge of theſe perfections is chiefly recommended to us in ſcripture, Jer. ix. 24. By theſe God reveals himſelf, and declares his name, and makes himſelf known to us, even by thoſe attributes which declare his goodneſs, and mercy, and juſtice, Exod. xxxiv. 6. 7. Pſal. lxxxvi. 15. Deut. xxxii. 3, 4, 5. When God would give a deſcription of himſelf to Moſes, he promiſes to *cauſe his goodneſs to paſs before him.* So that it doth not follow, that becauſe God's knowledge of future events is to be admitted, notwithſtanding the ſeeming contradiction and impoſſibility of it, therefore we are to admit of any notion of God's juſtice or goodneſs that ſeems contradictious or impoſſible. The

Third Objection is made up of ſeveral inconveniencies that would follow from God's knowledge of future events.

1. It would prejudice the liberty of the creature. For if God have an infallible knowledge of what we will do, then we cannot but do what he infallibly foreſees we will do; for otherwiſe his knowledge would be fallible.

Anſw. God's foreknowledge lays no neceſſity upon the event; in every event we may conſider the effect in itſelf, or with relation to the cauſe, and the manner how it comes to paſs: conſidered in itſelf, it is future; with relation to its cauſes, it is contingent.

gent. God ſees it as both, and ſo, as that which until it is, may be, or not be; and when it comes to paſs, he ſees the man do it freely; and ſo before it be done, it hath no neceſſity; but upon ſuppoſition of foreſight; as when it is, it hath upon ſuppoſition, that it is, as Origen excellently explains it. Foreknowledge is not the cauſe of the things that are foreknown; but becauſe the thing is future and ſhall be, this is the reaſon why it is foreknown; for it doth not, becauſe it was known, come to paſs; but becauſe it was to come to paſs, therefore it was foreknown; and bare knowledge is no more the cauſe of any event, which becauſe it is known muſt infallibly be, than my ſeeing a man run, is the cauſe of his running, which, becauſe I do ſee, is infallibly ſo.

2. If God infallibly foreknows what men will do, how can he be ſerious in his exhortations to repentance, his expectation of it, and his grieving for the impenitency of men?

Anſwer. All theſe are founded in the liberty of our actions. God exhorts to repentance, and expects it, becauſe, by his grace, we may do it: He is ſaid to grieve for our impenitency, becauſe we may do otherwiſe, and will not. Exhortations are not in vain themſelves, but very proper to their end; though, through our obſtinacy and hardneſs, they may be rendered vain to us, and without effect. If the weight of the objection lies upon *ſerious*, and you ask how God can exhort men ſeriouſly to that which he foreſees that they will not do; thoſe whom he foreknows will be finally impenitent? I anſwer, If his exhortations were not ſerious, he could not foreſee the final impenitency of men. To foreſee mens final impenitency, is to fore-ſee their wilful contempt of God's warnings and exhortations, and rejection of his grace. Now mens wilful contempt of his warnings and exhortations cannot be foreſeen, unleſs God foreſee that his exhortations are ſerious, and in good earneſt.

Having anſwered the objections againſt God's foreknowing future events, I proceed to ſhew,

II. That God only knows future events, Isa. xliv. 6, 7. *Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God: And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come? let them shew unto them.* Isa. xlvi. 9, 10. *Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none else, I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.*

The reason is evident, because the knowledge of future events is beyond the reach of any finite understanding; especially if we grant it to be beyond our finite understanding, to explain the possibility of such a knowledge; for, to be sure, that is out of the reach of our knowledge, which we cannot so much as understand how it is possible it should be known by any understanding.

But it may here be objected? Did not the oracles among the Heathen foretel several things, which Christians are satisfied came from the Devil? I have not time at present to examine the business of heathen oracles; I could easily shew there was much imposture in them: But grant they were really delivered and given out by a spirit; yet the darkness and ambiguity, the affected and contrived ambiguity, is such, as shews that the Devil was conscious to himself of the uncertainty of his knowledge in those matters: and those few that came to pass, and are in any tolerable sense said to be accomplished, were in such matters, either wherein prudent conjecture might go far (and I grant the Devil to be a sagacious spirit); or else in disjunctive cases, as when there are but two ways for a thing to be, it must either be so, or so, in which a bold guessing may often hit right: but guessing at future things, is far from a knowledge of them, which only can clearly be made out by punctual and particular predictions of things, with circumstances of time and person, such as we find

find in ſcripture in many inſtances, to the prediction of which, the greateſt ſagacity, and the utmoſt gueſſing could do nothing, ſuch as thoſe predictions of which I gave inſtances out of ſcripture.

I have now done with the firſt general head I propoſed to be ſpoken to from theſe words, *viz.* To prove that this attribute of knowledge belongs to God. I proceed to the

Second, viz. To conſider the perfection and prerogative of the divine knowledge; which I ſhall ſpeak to in theſe following particulars:

1. God's knowledge is preſent and actual, his eye is always open, and every thing is in the view of it. The knowledge of the creature is more power than act: it is not much that we are capable of knowing, but there is very little that we do actually know: it is but one thing that we can fix our thoughts upon at once, and apply our minds to; we can remove them to another object, but then we muſt take off our minds from the former, and quit the actual knowledge of it: but the knowledge of God is an actual and ſteady comprehenſion of things: he being every where preſent, and all eye, nothing can eſcape his ſight, but all the objects are at once in the view of the divine underſtanding, Heb. iv. 13. *Neither is there any creature that is not manifeſt in his ſight: but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

2. God's knowledge is an intimate and thorough knowledge, whereby he knows the very nature and eſſence of things. The knowledge which we have of things is but in part, but outward and ſuperficial; our knowledge glides upon the ſuperficies of things, but doth not penetrate into the intimate nature of them, it ſeldom reacheth further than the skin and outward appearance of things; we do not know things in their realities, but as they appear and are repreſented to us with all their masks and diſguiſes: but God knows things as they are, 1 Sam. xvi. 7. *The Lord ſeeth not as man ſeeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart*: God knows things throughout all that

can be known of them. The quick and piercing eye of God penetrates into every thing; the light of the divine underſtanding lays all things *open and naked*, Heb. iv. 13. In which expreſſion the Apoſtle alludes to the ſacrifices of beaſts, which were flea'd, and cleft down the back-bone, that the Prieſt might look into them, and ſee whether they were without blemiſh. To the eye of our underſtandings moſt objects are cloſe, and have their skins upon them; but to the eyes of God all things are uncovered and diſſected, and ly open to his view.

3. God's knowledge is clear and diſtinct. Our underſtandings in the knowledge of things are liable to great confuſion; we are often deceived with the near likeneſs and reſemblance of things, and miſtake one thing for another; our knowledge is but a twilight, which doth not ſufficiently ſeparate and diſtinguiſh things from one another; we ſee things many times together, and in a heap, and do but know them in groſs: but there is no confuſion in the divine underſtanding, that is a clear light which ſeparates and diſtinguiſheth things of the greateſt nearneſs and reſemblance. God hath a particular knowledge of the leaſt things: Luke xii. 7. *Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered*; thoſe things which are of the leaſt conſideration, and have the greateſt likeneſs to one another; *the very hairs of your head* are ſeverally and diſtinctly known to God.

4. God's knowledge is certain and infallible. We are ſubject to doubt and error in our underſtanding of things; every thing almoſt impoſeth upon our underſtandings, and tinctures our minds, and makes us look on things otherwiſe than they are; our temper and complexion, our education and prejudice, our intereſt and advantage, our humours and diſtempers; theſe all miſrepreſent things, and darken our minds, and ſeduce our judgments, and betray us to error and miſtake: but the divine underſtanding is a clear, fixed, conſtant, and undiſturbed light, a pure mirror that receives no ſtain from affection,

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or intereſt, or any other thing. Men are many times confident, and apt to impoſe upon others, as if they were infallible: but this is the prerogative of God, the privilege of the divine underſtanding, that it is ſecure from all poſſibility of error: it is God only *that cannot lie*, Tit. i. 2. becauſe he cannot be deceived. The infallibility of God is the foundation of his veracity.

5. The knowledge of God is eaſy and without difficulty. We muſt dig deep for knowledge, take a great deal of pains to know a little; we do not attain the knowledge of things without ſearch and ſtudy, and great intention of mind; we ſtrive to comprehend ſome things, but they are ſo vaſt that we cannot: other things are at ſuch a diſtance, that our underſtanding is too weak to diſcern them; other things are ſo little, and ſmall, and nice, that our underſtanding cannot lay hold of them, we cannot contract our minds to ſuch a point as to faſten upon them; but the underſtanding of God being infinite, there is nothing at a diſtance from it, nothing too great and vaſt for its comprehenſion; nor is there any thing ſo little, that it can eſcape his knowledge and animadverſion. The great wiſdom of Solomon is compared to the ſand on the ſea-ſhore; the ſhore is vaſt, but the ſands are little, (ſaith one) to ſignify that the vaſt mind of Solomon did comprehend the leaſt things. It is much more true of God; his underſtanding is a vaſt comprehenſion of the leaſt things, as well as the greateſt; and and all this God does without difficulty or pain; he knows all things without ſtudy, and his underſtanding is in continual exerciſe without wearineſs. How many things are there which we cannot find out without ſearch, without looking narrowly into, and bending our minds to underſtand them? But all things are obvious to God, and ly open to his view.

He is ſaid, indeed, in ſcripture, *to ſearch the heart*, and *to try the reins*, and *to weigh the ſpirits*: but theſe expreſſions do not ſignify the painfulneſs, but the perfection of his knowledge: that he knows thoſe things as perfectly as we can do any thing,

things about which we uſe the greateſt diligence and exactneſs.

6. The knowledge of God is univerſal, and extends to all objects. We know but a few things, our ignorance is greater than our knowledge; *Maxima pars eorum quæ ſcimus, eſt minima pars eorum quæ neſcimus:* but the divine underſtanding is vaſt and comprehenſive, and by an imperious view commands all objects; *he is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things*; he knows himſelf, and the excellency and perfection of his own nature, and the ſecrets of his will, 1 Cor. ii. 11. *The ſpirit of God ſearcheth the deep things of God*; he knows all other things that are not, and all things that are, in all differences of time, their powers and qualities. The knowledge of God is infinite; Pſal. cxlvii. 5. *His underſtanding is infinite:* he knows himſelf, and his own perfections, and all the poſſibilities of things, which are all infinite. Now the underſtanding of God being infinite, is incapable of any addition, or diminution or change. Our finite underſtandings are liable to alterations; they may grow or decline: but the knowledge of God is a full, conſtant light; it is always the ſame, not liable to any eclipſe, nor capable of any exaltation or improvement, but remains for ever the ſame.

Thirdly, I come now to draw ſome inferences from the ſeveral parts of this diſcourſe.

I. From the perfection of God's knowledge.

1. The perfection of the divine knowledge calls for our veneration. Every excellency commands reverence, and raiſeth our admiration, and none more than knowledge: There is nothing that we value ourſelves or others more by, than this. The higheſt knowledge of man, the moſt glorious underſtanding, that ever any one of the ſons of men were endued with, is, compared to the knowledge of God, but as a glow-worm to the ſun. If we admire theſe candles of the Lord, which ſhine ſo imperfectly in the dark; if we reverence a little knowledge, compaſſed about with ignorance; how ſhould we admire *the Father of lights, in whom is no darkneſs at all*, that know-

knowledge which hath nothing of blemiſh or imperfection in it!

2. We may hence learn humility, and that on this double account, as we have all our knowledge from him: *What have we that we have not received?* and as our knowledge is very imperfect, when compared with the divine underſtanding. We are blind and ignorant; it is but a few things that we are capable of knowing; and we know but a few of thoſe things which our natures are capable of knowing; and of thoſe things we do know, our knowledge is very imperfect, it is ſlight and ſuperficial, attended with much difficulty and uncertainty in the attaining of it, and error and confuſion in the uſe of it; the cleareſt reaſon, and the brighteſt underſtanding of man, hath many flaws and defects in it: ſo that the more we know of God, and of ourſelves, the more humble we ſhall be. It is *an empty knowledge, and falſly ſo called,* that *puffs up*; as the empty ears of corn are pert, and raiſe up themſelves; but thoſe which are big and full, droop and hang down their heads: ſo it is only ignorance that is proud, and lifts men up, but true knowledge makes men humble.

3. This is matter of comfort and encouragement: He knows our wants and weakneſs, *and will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear*; *for he conſiders that we are but duſt*; he knows the rage and malice of our enemies, and can, when he pleaſes, *put a hook in their noſe,* and *his bridle in their lips,* as he did to Sennacherib, 2 Kings xix. 28.

II. From God's knowing our ſecret actions, I infer,

1. If God ſees our moſt ſecret actions, this diſcovers and confutes the ſecret atheiſm of many. He that commits the moſt ſecret ſin, denies the omniſcience of God. Thus David deſcribes the atheiſm of ſome in his days: *He hath ſaid in his heart, God hath forgot, he hideth his face, he will never ſee it: The Lord ſhall not ſee, neither ſhall the God of Jacob regard it.* And is not this, in effect, to deny God's being? for it is to deny him to be what he is. A

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man may as well deny there is a ſun, as deny that it ſhines and enlightens the world.

There are ſome relicks of this even in the beſt men, which do at ſome times diſcover themſelves: Pſal. lxxiii. 10, 11. *Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them: And they ſay, how doth God know? is there knowledge in the Moſt High?* that is, the people of God come to this, when they are come to an afflicted ſtate, and ſee the proſperity of wicked men; they come to this, to queſtion the providence of God, whether he takes knowledge of the affairs of the world. But this atheiſm reigns in wicked men; while they live in their ſins, they live in the denial of God's omniſcience: for did men really believe that *God ſees in ſecret*, that his eye perceives the darkneſs, and lays open and naked all things before it, how durſt they lie, and ſteal and ſwear falſly? Vain man! why doſt thou ſeek darkneſs and retirement? How art thou alone, if thou believeſt that God is every where? How canſt thou retire from him? How canſt thou ſhut him out? If thou believeſt that he is the light, what ſecurity is darkneſs to thee? If he look upon thee, who is the greateſt and beſt perſon in the world, who is thy Sovereign, thy Judge, thy Father, and thy Maſter, and thy beſt Friend, (for we uſe to reverence perſons under theſe notions and relations, and to be aſhamed to do any thing that is vile and unſeemly before them) if he, who is all this, look upon thee, why art thou not aſhamed? Why does not thy blood riſe in thy face? Why ſhould not ſhame and fear work upon the apprehenſion of God's ſeeing us, as if men did behold us? For this, that God ſees thee, is a greater ſurpriſe and diſcovery, and threatens thee with more danger, than if the whole world ſtood by thee.

2. Live as thoſe that believe this; be continually under the power of this apprehenſion, that God takes a particular and exact notice of all thy actions. The firm belief of this would have a double influence upon us, it would encourage us in well-doing, and be a reſtraint upon us as to ſin; *Sic vivamus tanquam*

quam in conſpectu vivamus, Seneca. It were well if men would live as if any body ſaw them; but to live as if ſome worthy and excellent perſon were always preſent with us, and did obſerve us, this will be a far greater curb upon us. There are ſome ſins of that uglineſs and deformity, that a man would not commit them in the preſence of any one, of a child, or a fool; and there are ſome perſons of ſuch worth and reverence, *quorum interventu perditi quoque homines vitia ſupprimerent.* Epicurus had this good conceit of himſelf, that he could adviſe others ſo to act as if he ſtood by, *Fac omnia tanquam ſpectet Epicurus:* But Seneca inſtanceth much better in Cato, or Scipio, or Lælius;

Ut ſic tanquam illo ſpectante vivamus.

and ſhall not the preſence of the divine Majeſty be an eternal reſtraint upon us?

This was David's courſe to keep himſelf from ſin, Pſal. xxxix. 1. *I will take heed to my ways while the wicked is before me*; how much more in the preſence of God? *I have kept thy precepts and thy teſtimonies, for all my ways are before thee*, Pſal. cxix. 168. And it was wiſely adviſed by Seneca, *That we ſhould ſo live when we are among men, as believing God ſees us*; and *when there is none but he ſees us, let us behave ourſelves before him, as if men did ſtare upon us.*

III. God's knowledge of the heart teacheth us,

1. The folly of hypocriſy: How vain it is to make a ſhew of that outwardly, which inwardly and in our hearts we are not; to put on a mask of religion, and paint ourſelves beautifully without, when *inwardly we are full of rottenneſs and uncleanneſs*; to *honour God with our lips, when our hearts are far from him*? If we were to deal with men, this were not a very wiſe way, for there is danger of diſcovery even from them; therefore the beſt way for a man to ſeem to be any thing, is really to be what he would appear: but having to deal with God, who *knows our thoughts afar off*, to whom all our diſguiſes are tranſparent, and all our little arts of concealment ſignify nothing, it is a madneſs to hide our

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iniquity in our boſom. With this argument our Saviour convinceth the hypocritical Phariſees, Luke xvi. 15. *Ye are they that juſtify yourſelves before men; but God knoweth your hearts.*

2. If God know your hearts, then endeavour to approve your hearts to him; charge yourſelves with inward purity and holineſs, becauſe of the pure eyes which behold the moſt intimate and ſecret motions of your ſouls; therefore cleanſe your hearts from wickedneſs: *how long ſhall vain thoughts lodge within you?* Fear and ſhame from men lay a great reſtraint upon our outward actions; but how licentious are we many times in our hearts? What a ſtrange freedom do we take within our own breaſts? This is an argument of the ſecret atheiſm that lies at the bottom of our hearts. He that allows himſelf in any wicked thoughts and imaginations, which (out of regard to men) he will not put into practice, this man plainly declares that he reverenceth men more than God; that he either disbelieves a God, or deſpiſeth him.

Therefore *keep your hearts with all diligence*, becauſe they are peculiarly under God's inſpection; and when you are ready to take the liberty of your thoughts, becauſe no eye ſees you, ask yourſelves, *Doth not he that pondereth the hears conſider it? And he that keepeth thy ſoul, doth he not know it?* as the wiſe man ſpeaks, Prov. xxiv. 12.

And whatever you do in the ſervice of God, *do it heartily as to the Lord.* Indeed, if we did only worſhip God, *to be ſeen of men*, an external worſhip would be ſufficient; but religion is not intended to pleaſe men, but God; he is a ſpirit, and ſees our ſpirits, therefore we muſt *worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth*, 1 Theſſ. ii. 4. *Not as pleaſing men, but God, who trieth our hearts.* David uſeth this argument to his ſon Solomon, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. *And thou Solomon, my ſon, know thou the God of thy Father, and ſerve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord ſearcheth all hearts, and underſtandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.* Whatever liberty we may take to ourſelves now, and

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how careleſs ſoever we are of our thoughts, and the inward frame of our hearts, yet the ſcripture aſſures us, that he who knows our hearts, will one day judge us according to them, Jer. xvii. 10. *I the Lord ſearch the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways.* And the Apoſtle ſpeaks of *a day coming wherein God will judge the ſecrets of men by Jeſus Chriſt*, Heb. iv. 13. Rev. ii. 23.

3. This is matter of encouragement to us in many caſes: In our ſecret troubles, Pſal. cxlii. 3. *When my ſpirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou kneweſt my path.* In caſes of difficulty which depend upon the hearts of other men, which though we do not know, yet God knows them: ſo the Apoſtles, Acts i. 24. when they did not know whom to chooſe for an Apoſtle, they refer it to God; and *they prayed, and ſaid, Thou, Lord, which knoweſt the hearts of all men, ſhew whether of theſe two thou haſt choſen.* But eſpecially this is matter of comfort to us, when we ſuffer by the calumnies and reproaches of men, when the world chargeth us with crimes of hypocriſy and falſeneſs, and inſincerity, then to be able to appeal to the *ſearcher of hearts*, as to our innocency and ſincerity, and to ſay with the Prophet Jeremiah, O *Lord of hoſts, that trieſt the righteous, and ſeeſt the reins and the heart, unto thee have I opened my cauſe*, chap. xx. 12. and with St. Peter, *God which knoweth the hearts, bare them witneſs*, Acts xv. 8.

4. This renders all the deep and profound policies of wicked men a vain thing: *The Lord knows the thoughts of men that they are vanity*; becauſe he knows them, and can defeat them; he can *bring their counſels to nought, and make their devices of none effect*. He is conſcious to the firſt motions of their hearts; he ſees thoſe cobwebs which they are ſpinning, and can blow them away with a breath; he can ſnare them in their own policies, and *turn their counſels into fooliſhneſs*. Thou that putteſt a mask upon a wicked deſign, and hideſt the malice and revenge of thine heart under a diſſembling counte-

nance, God ſees thy deſign, and hath a thouſand ways to prevent it. When the politicians of the world think they have laid their deſign with all imaginable caution, and that their counſels cannot miſcarry, being out of all poſſibility of human diſcovery or prevention; for all this, *their counſels may come to nought*, and though *they have reſolved it*, yet it may *not ſtand*; *he that ſits in the heavens laughs at them, the Lord hath them in deriſion*. As wiſe as they are, they are guilty of this overſight, that they did not take God into conſideration, by whom they are ſurpriſed and diſcovered. He that ſees their deſign, can blaſt it in a moment; he *can ſpeak the word*, and *thy breath ſhall go forth, and thou ſhalt return to thy duſt, and in that very day thy thoughts periſh*, Pſal cxlvi. 4.

5. If God only knows the hearts of men, then *what art thou, O man, that judgeſt another's heart?* This condemns the uncharitableneſs of men, who take upon them to judge and cenſure mens hearts; which is, *to ſpeak evil of the things which they know not*; to meddle with things which do not fall under their cognizance. What St. James ſaith, chap. iv. 12. *There is one law-giver, that is able to ſave, and to deſtroy; who art thou that judgeſt another?* is proportionably true in this caſe; there is but *one that knows the heart*; *who art thou then that judgeſt another man's heart?* Who art thou, O man! that takeſt upon thee to ſit in judgment upon thy brother, and to paſs ſentence upon his heart, to pronounce him an hypocrite, a wicked man, and a damned wretch? Art thou a man, and the ſon of man, and wilt thou aſſume to thyſelf the prerogative of God? Man can only look to the outward appearance; but *God ſeeth the heart*.

There is nothing doth more palpably diſcover the unchriſtian ſpirit of that new ſect which is of late riſen up amongſt us, than their taking upon them to judge men's hearts, and as confidently to cenſure every man they meet, as if they a had a window into his breaſt: But they are not alone guilty of this; thoſe who are ſo ready to call men hypocrites

crites, they invade this prerogative of God. We may pronounce an action wicked, if it be contrary to the rule; or a man wicked, as to his preſent ſtate, if the general courſe of his life and actions be wicked; for our Saviour tells us, *by their fruits ye ſhall know them.* This we may do, provided we be called to it, and be ſure it is ſo: but to call any man an hypocrite, who makes an outward profeſſion of religion, and whoſe external converſation is unblameable; this is to judge a man in a matter of which thou can'ſt have no evidence; this is *to aſcend into heaven,* and ſtep into *the throne of God, and to be like the moſt High*; for *he, even he only, knows the hearts of the children of men.*

IV. From God's knowledge of future events we may learn,

1. The vanity of Aſtrology, and all other arts that pretend to foretel future events, things that depend on the will of free agents. The vanity of theſe arts hath been ſufficiently ſhewn by learned men, from the weakneſs and uncertainty of the principles they rely upon: I ſhall only for the preſent take notice, that it contradicts this principle of religion, *That God only knows future events.* From prudent collections and obſervations, probable conjectures may be made of what will happen in ſome caſes; but there are no certain perſpective-glaſſes, with which we can ſee future events, but divine revelation; therefore, whoever takes upon him to foretel future events without divine revelation, he arrogates to himſelf that which is the prerogative of the Deity; and God delights to chaſtiſe the curioſity, and croſs the predictions of theſe vain pretenders: Iſa. xliv. 24, 25. *Thus ſaith the Lord that formed thee; I am the Lord that maketh all things, that ſtretcheth forth the heavens alone, that ſpreadeth abroad the earth by myſelf; that fruſtrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wiſe men backward, and maketh their knowledge fooliſh*; as he alſo in ſcripture threatens thoſe who conſult them, and rely upon them. Thoſe who go to aſtrologers, or wiſe men, as they call them, to know

their fortunes, and enquire of the events of their life, they *forſake God*, and *betake themſelves to lying vanities.*

2. Refer future things to God who only knows them; truſt him with all events; *caſt your care upon him.* When you have uſed your beſt prudence, and wiſdom, and diligence for your ſupply and ſecurity for the future, leave the reſt to God, *for your heavenly Father knoweth* both your wants and your dangers. When we are over ſollicitous about future things, we take God's proper work out of his hands, and uſurp the government of the world. Why do we *take too much upon us? We are but of yeſterday*, and *know not what will be to-morrow.*

Mind your preſent duty and work, and leave events to God: *Secret things belong to the Lord our God; but thoſe things that are revealed to us, and our children for ever, to do all the words of this law*, Deut. xxix. 29. Do your Duty, *commit the reſt to God in well-doing.*

In this world we are in a mixed condition, which is made up of good and evil, of happineſs and miſery: What is good for us to know, is revealed, that is our duty; but in great wiſdom and pity to mankind, God hath concealed and hid the reſt from us. He hath hid from us the good that may happen to us; becauſe the beſt things of this world are but ſhallow and empty, and if we could ſee them before-hand, we ſhould prevent ourſelves in the enjoyment of them, and eat out the ſweetneſs which is in them, by delightful forethoughts of them: And he hath concealed future evils from us, leſt we ſhould torment ourſelves with the fearful expectation of them.

Prudens, futuri temporis exitum,
Caliginoſâ nocte premit Deus:
Ridetque, ſi mortalis ultra
Fas trepidat.

What a folly is it to make yourſelves miſerable with fear of being ſo; *ante miſerias miſer!* Uſe all wiſe means to prevent what you fear, and then be ſatisfied, and be as happy as you can, till miſery come; go

go not forth to meet it, *ſufficient for the day is the evil thereof*; do not anticipate the evils of to-morrow, and take preſent poſſeſſion of an evil to come; *caſt your care upon him*, who hath promiſed to *care for you*.

SERMON CXXXVI.

The wiſdom, glory, and ſovereignty of God.

JUDE ver. 25.

To the only wiſe God our Saviour, be glory and majeſty, dominion and power, now and ever.

I Am treating of the attributes of God, particularly of thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, his knowledge and wiſdom. The knowledge of God, only implies his bare underſtanding of things; but his wiſdom implies the skill of ordering and diſpoſing things to the beſt ends and purpoſes, the skill of making and governing, and adminiſtring all things in number, weight and meaſure. The knowledge of God rather conſiders things abſolutely, and in themſelves: The wiſdom of God, conſiders rather the reſpects and relations of things, looks upon things under the notion of means, and ends; accordingly I deſcribe them thus: The knowledge of God, is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, with all their qualities, powers, and circumſtances. The wiſdom of God, is a perfect comprehenſion of the reſpects and relations of things one to another; of their harmony and oppoſition, their fitneſs and unfitneſs to ſuch and ſuch ends. I have largely ſpoken to the firſt of theſe: I come now to the

Second, The wiſdom of God in general; together with his majeſty and ſovereignty, as they are here joined together. I begin with the

Firſt, That *God is the only wiſe God.* In handling of this, I ſhall ſhew,

1. In what ſenſe God may be ſaid to be *the only wiſe God.*

2. Prove that this attribute belongs to God.

1. In what ſenſe God may be ſaid to be *the only wiſe God.* For anſwer to this, we may take notice, that there are ſome perfections of God that are incommunicable to the creatures; as his independency and eternity: Theſe God only poſſeſſeth, and they are to be attributed to him alone; God only is independent and eternal: but there are other perfections which are communicable, that is, which the creatures may, in ſome meaſure and degree, partake of, as knowledge, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and juſtice, and power, and the like; yet theſe the ſcriptures do peculiarly attribute to God; not that they are altogether incommunicable to the creature, but that they belong to God in ſuch a peculiar and divine manner, as doth ſhut out the creature from any claim or title to them, in that degree and perfection wherein God poſſeſſeth them. I ſhall give you ſome inſtances of this. His goodneſs, this is reſerved to God alone, Matth. xix. 17. *Why calleſt thou me good? there is none good, but one, that is God:* His *power* and *immortality*, 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. *Who is the bleſſed and only potentate; who only hath immortality.* His *wiſdom*, 1 Tim. i. 17. *The only wiſe God:* Rom. xvi. 27. *To God only wiſe be glory.* His *holineſs*, Rev. xv. 14. *For thou only art holy.* The tranſcendent degree and ſingularity of theſe divine perfections which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive: ſo that although the creatures partake of them, yet in that degree and perfection wherein God poſſeſſeth them, they are peculiar and proper to the Deity: ſo that, in this ſenſe, *there is none good but God*; he only is holy, he is *the only wiſe*: in ſo inconceivable a manner doth God poſſeſs even thoſe perfections, which in ſome degree he communicates; and we can only underſtand them, as he communicates them, and not as he poſſeſſeth them; ſo that when we conſider any of theſe divine per-

perfections, we must not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature: but we must say that the goodness and wisdom of God are all this which is in the creature, and much more, which I am not able to comprehend.

This being premised in general, God may be said to be only wise in these two respects:

I. As being originally and independently wise.

II. As being eminently and transcendently so.

1. God only is originally and independently wise. He derives it from none, and all derive it from him: Rom. xi. 33, 34. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.* He challengeth any creature to come forth and say, that they have given wisdom, or any other perfection, to God: No, all creatures that are partakers of it, derive it from him: Prov. ii. 6. *For the Lord giveth wisdom.* Eccles. ii. 26. *God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.* Dan. ii. 21. *He giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.*

2. He is eminently and transcendently so: And this follows from the former, because God is the fountain of wisdom, therefore it is most eminently in him: Psal. xciv. 9, 10. *He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?* In like manner we may reason concerning all other attributes of God, that if he communicates them, he is much more eminently possessed of them himself; the greatest wisdom of the creatures is nothing in opposition to the wisdom of God, nothing in comparison to it.

Nothing in opposition to it: Job. v. 13. *He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.* Job ix. 4. *He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: Who hath hardened*

ened himſelf againſt him, and proſpered? Prov. xxi. 30. *There is no wiſdom, nor underſtanding, nor counſel againſt the Lord.* 1 Cor. i. 19. *He will deſtroy the wiſdom of the wiſe*; ver. 29. *and by fooliſh things confound the wiſe.*

Nothing in compariſon of it. There are a great many that pretend to wiſdom; but moſt are deſtitute of true wiſdom: and thoſe who have it, have it with many imperfections and diſadvantages. Uſually thoſe who are deſtitute of true wiſdom, pretend moſt to it: Job xi. 12. *Vain man would be wiſe, though he be born like a wild aſs's colt.* The high and the great of this world pretend to it: Job. xxxii. 9. *Great men are not always wiſe.* Learned men, they pretend to it; the heathen Philoſophers were great profeſſors of wiſdom: Rom. i. 22. *Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools:* They were *wiſe to do evil, but to do good they had no underſtanding*, as the Prophet ſpeaks, Jer. iv. 22. The politicians of the world, they pretend to it; but theirs is rather a craftineſs than a wiſdom. Men call it prudence; but they are glad to uſe many arts to ſet it off, and make it look like wiſdom; by ſilence and ſecrecy, and formality, and affected gravity, and nods and geſtures. The ſcripture calls it *the wiſdom of this world*, 1 Cor. ii. 6. and a *fleſhly wiſdom*, 2 Cor. i. 12. It is wiſdom miſapplied; it is the purſuit of a wrong end. The petty plots and deſigns of this world are far from wiſdom: 1 Cor. iii. 20. *The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wiſe, that they are vain.* That cannot be wiſdom, which miſtakes its great end, which minds mean things, and neglects thoſe which are of greateſt concernment to them: Job xxii. 2. *He that is wiſe, is profitable to himſelf.* Prov. ix. 12. *If thou be wiſe, thou ſhalt be wiſe for thyſelf.* Tully tells us, Ennius was wont to ſay, *Ne quicquam ſapere ſapientem, qui ſibi ipſi prodeſſe non quiret:* The wiſe ſages of the world as to the beſt things are fools, Mat. xi. 25. *God hath hid theſe things from the wiſe and prudent.* There are many that are *wiſe in their own conceits*; *but there is more hope of a fool than of them*, Prov. xxvi. 12. So that the greateſt part

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that which passeth for wisdom among men, is quite another thing. *Nihil tam valde vulgare quàm nihil sapere*; we talk much of prodigies, *maximum portentum vir sapiens*, Tully. Those few in the world that are *the children of true wisdom*, they have it in a very imperfect degree; they are not usually so wise for their souls, and for eternity, as men of this world. Luke xvi. 8. *The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.* It is attended with many inconveniencies, Eccl. i. 18. *In much wisdom there is much grief*; he speaks of the wisdom about natural things.

But we need not instance in the folly of wicked men, and worldly men, and in the imperfect degrees of wisdom which are to be found in good men, in wisdom's own children; the wisdom of God needs not these foils to set it off: the wisdom of man in innocency, or of the highest Angel in heaven bears no proportion to the unerring and infinite wisdom of God. We mortal men, many times mistake our end out of ignorance, and apply unfit and improper means for accomplishing good ends; the Angels in glory have not a perfect comprehension of the harmony and agreement of things, of the unfitness and opposition of them one to another: but the divine wisdom propounds to itself the highest and best ends, and hath a perfect comprehension of the fitness and unfitness of all things one to another; so that the Angels are but foolish beings to God. Job iv. 17. *His Angels he chargeth with folly.* Job, upon a full enquiry after wisdom, concludes that it only belongs to God, that he only is perfectly possessed of it, Job xxviii. 12, *&c. But where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?* In such an eminent and transcendent degree it is not to be met with in any of the creatures; God only hath it, ver. 23. *God knoweth the place thereof.*

II. I shall prove that this perfection belongs to God,

1. From the dictates of natural reason; and,
2. From scripture.

1. From

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon. I have often told you the perfections of God are not to be proved by way of demonſtration, becauſe there is no cauſe of them; but by way of conviction, by ſhewing the abſurdity and inconvenience of the contrary.

The contrary is an imperfection, and argues many other imperfections; therefore wiſdom belongs to God. Among men folly is looked upon as the greateſt defect; it is accounted a greater reproach and diſgrace than vice and wickedneſs; it is of ſo ill a report in the world, that there are not many but had rather be accounted knaves than fools; but in a true eſteem and value of things, it is, next to wickedneſs, the greateſt imperfection; and, on the contrary, wiſdom is the higheſt perfection next to holineſs and goodneſs; it is uſually more cried up in the world than any thing elſe. Reaſon tells us, though the ſcripture had not ſaid it; that *wiſdom excells folly as much as light doth darkneſs*, Eccl. ii. 13. *The wiſdom of a man maketh his face to ſhine*, Eccl. viii. 1; *Wiſdom is a defence*, ——vii. 12. and ver. 19. *Wiſdom ſtrengtheneth the wiſe more than ten mighty men that are in the city.*

And the denial of this perfection to God, would argue many other imperfections; it would be an univerſal blemiſh to the divine nature, and would darken all his other perfections. It would weaken the power of God. How impotent and ineffectual would power be without wiſdom! what irregular things would it produce! what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power ſhould act without the conduct and direction of infinite wiſdom! it would eclipſe the providence of God, and put out the eyes that are in the wheels, as the Prophet repreſents God's providence. There can be no counſel, no forecaſt, no orderly government of the world without wiſdom. The goodneſs, and mercy, and juſtice, and truth of God, could not ſhine with that luſtre, were it not for his wiſdom, which doth illuſtrate theſe with ſo much advantage.

I need

I need not bring teſtimonies from heathen writers to confirm this; their books are full of expreſſions of their admiration of God's wiſe government of the world. I need not trouble you with quotations of particular teſtimonies. Epicurus indeed denied that God either made or governed the world; but he muſt needs acknowledge him to have been a very wiſe being, becauſe he made him happy, which cannot be without wiſdom, though he had taken away all other evidence of his wiſdom. Ariſtotle ſeems to have ſuppoſed the world to be a neceſſary reſult and emanation from God: but then the other ſects of Philoſophers did ſuppoſe the world to be the free product of God's goodneſs and wiſdom.

2. From ſcripture; Job ix. 4. *He is wiſe in heart*; ——xxxvi. 5. *He is mighty in ſtrength and wiſdom.* Dan. ii. 20. *Bleſſed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wiſdom and might are his.* Hither we may refer thoſe texts, which attribute wiſdom to God in a ſingular and peculiar manner, Rom. xvi. 27. and thoſe which ſpeak of God as the fountain of it, who communicates and beſtows it upon his creatures, Dan. ii. 21. James i. 5. and thoſe texts which ſpeak of the wiſdom of God in the creation of the world, Pſal. civ. 24. *O Lord, how wonderful are thy works, in wiſdom haſt thou made them all!* Jer. x. 12. *Who hath eſtabliſhed the world by his wiſdom, and ſtretched forth the heavens by his diſcretion*; in the providence and government of the world. Dan. ii. 20. *Wiſdom and ſtrength are his, and he changeth times and ſeaſons; he removeth Kings, and ſetteth up Kings:* and in many other places, in the redemption of mankind. Therefore Chriſt is called *the wiſdom of God*, 1 Cor. i. 24. and the diſpenſation of the goſpel, *the hidden wiſdom of God, and the manifold wiſdom of God*, Eph. ii. 10.

If then God be *only wiſe*, the original and only fountain of it, from thence we learn,

Firſt, To go to him for it, Jam. i. 5. *If any man lack wiſdom, let him aſk it of God.* There are many conceited men that think they are rich and increaſed, and ſtand in need of nothing. The Apoſtle doth

doth not ſpeak, as if there were ſome that did not want wiſdom, but becauſe there are ſome ſo proud and conceited, that they think they lack nothing; thoſe are ſtark fools, and God *reſiſts* ſuch fooliſh and proud men: But if any man, ſenſible of his defect and imperfection, cometh to God, *he gives liberally and upbraids no man.* We are aſhamed to learn wiſdom of men, leſt they ſhould contemn and upbraid us with our folly: Men are envious and unwilling that others ſhould be as wiſe as themſelves; but God's goodneſs makes him willing to impart wiſdom; *he gives liberally, and upbraids no man.*

This is the moſt deſirable accompliſhment and perfection; *Happy is the man that getteth wiſdom; wiſdom is the principal thing; therefore get wiſdom:* It is better than thoſe things which are of the higheſt value amongſt men, as Solomon often makes the compariſon. Now becauſe *it comes down from above,* we ſhould *look up* for it; it is by the revelation of his will, and the wiſe counſels of his word, that we are made *wiſe unto ſalvation*; therefore we ſhould beg of him, that *he would give us the ſpirit of wiſdom and revelation in the knowledge of himſelf,* Eph. i. 17.

2. If God be only wiſe in ſuch an eminent and tranſcendent degree, then let us be humble. There is no cauſe of boaſting, ſeeing *we have nothing but what we have received.* The loweſt inſtance, the leaſt ſpecimen of divine wiſdom out-ſhines the higheſt pitch of human wiſdom; *the fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than men,* 1 Cor. i. 25. therefore *let not the wiſe man glory in his wiſdom,* Jer. ix. 29. Of all things we ſhould not be proud of wiſdom; the proud man throws down the reputation of his wiſdom, by the way that he would raiſe it. No ſuch evidence of our folly, as a conceit that we are wiſe; *ſapientis animus nunquam turgeſcit, nunquam tumet,* Cic. To pride ourſelves in our wiſdom, is the way to have our folly made manifeſt. God threatens *to deſtroy the wiſdom of the wiſe men,* and *to turn their wiſdom into fooliſhneſs.*

3. We

3. We ſhould labour to partake of the wiſdom of God, ſo far as it is communicable. The greateſt wiſdom that we are capable of, is to diſtinguiſh between good and evil; *to be wiſe to that which is good,* as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, Rom. xvi. 19. that is, to provide for the future in time, to make proviſion for eternity, to think of our latter end, to fear God and obey him, to be pure and peaceable, to receive inſtruction, and to win ſouls; theſe are the characters which the ſcripture gives of wiſdom. When Job had declared, that the excellency of the divine wiſdom was not to be attained by men; he tells us what that wiſdom is, which is proper for us: *And unto man he ſaid, The fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom; and to depart from evil, that is underſtanding.* There are many that are wiſe to worldly ends and purpoſes, as our Saviour tells us; wiſe to get riches, and to aſcend to honours: But this is not the wiſdom which we are to labour after; this is but a ſhort-witted prudence, to ſerve a preſent turn, without any proſpect to the future, without regard to the next world, and the eternity which we are to live in; this is to be wiſe for a moment, and fools for ever.

4. If God be only wiſe, then put your truſt and confidence in him. Whom ſhould we truſt rather than infinite wiſdom, which manageth and directs infinite goodneſs and power? In all caſes of difficulty truſt him for direction; *acknowledge him in all thy ways,* that he may *direct thy ſteps; commit thy way unto the Lord, and lean not to thine own underſtanding. The race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong,* but the providence of God diſpoſeth all theſe things. And if we rely upon our own wiſdom, that will prove a *broken reed.* And as our own wiſdom is a broken reed, ſo the wiſdom of other men. Iſai. xxxi. 1, 2. God curſeth them that *go down into Egypt, and truſt to their ſtrength and wiſdom, but look not to the holy One of Iſrael, neither ſeek the Lord; yet he alſo is wiſe,* ſaith the Prophet.

5. Let us adore the wiſdom of God, and ſay with St. Paul, 1 Tim. i. 17. *To the only wiſe God, be honour and glory for ever and ever,* Amen: and with

Daniel, *Bleſſed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wiſdom and might are his.* Veneration is the acknowledgment of an infinite excellency and perfection. We reverence any extraordinary degree of wiſdom in men; but the divine wiſdom, which is perfect and infinite, is matter of our adoration, and bleſſing, and praiſe. Thanſgiving reſpects the benefits we receive: but we bleſs God when we acknowledge any excellency: for as God's bleſſing us, is to do us good; ſo our bleſſing him, is to ſpeak good of him: As all God's perfections are the objects of our bleſſing, ſo more eſpecially his wiſdom is of our praiſe; for the praiſe of God is to take notice of the wiſe deſign and contrivance of his goodneſs and mercy towards us.

Before I paſs on to the other particulars contained in theſe words, I cannot but take notice, that this wiſe God here ſpoken of, is ſtiled our Saviour, which ſome underſtand of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, and bring this place as an argument to prove his divinity; and if that were ſo, it were all one to my purpoſe, which is in the next place to ſhew, that glory, and majeſty, and dominion, and power, belong to the divine Being. But although I would not willingly part with any place that may fairly be brought for the proof of the divinity of Chriſt, yet ſeeing there are ſo many plain texts in ſcripture for the proof of it, we have have the leſs reaſon to ſtretch doubtful places; and that this is ſo, will appear to any one who conſiders that the title of *Saviour* is ſeveral times in ſcripture attributed to God the Father; beſides that, in a very ancient and authentick copy we find the words read ſomewhat otherwiſe, and ſo as to put this out of all controverſy, μόνῳ θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα, &c.

Having premiſed thus much for the clearing of theſe words, I ſhall briefly conſider, *firſt*, God's glory and majeſty, and then his dominion and ſovereignty.

Firſt, God's glory and majeſty. By majeſty, we may underſtand the greatneſs, or eminent excellency of the divine nature, which reſults from his perfections,

ons, and whereby the divine nature is ſet and placed infinitely above all other beings; I ſay, the eminent excellency of the divine nature, which reſults from his perfections, more eſpecially from thoſe great perfections, his goodneſs, and wiſdom, and power, and holineſs.

And his glory is a manifeſtation of this excellency, and a juſt acknowledgment and due opinion of it. Hence it is, that in ſcripture, God is ſaid to be glorious in power, and glorious in holineſs, and his goodneſs is called his glory; and here in the text, glory and majeſty are aſcribed to him upon the account of his wiſdom and goodneſs.

That theſe belong to God, I ſhall prove,

1. From the acknowledgment of natural light. The Heathen did conſtantly aſcribe greatneſs to God, and that as reſulting chiefly from his goodneſs, as appears by their frequent conjunction of theſe two attributes, goodneſs and greatneſs, *opt. max.* were their moſt familiar titles of the Deity; to which I will add that known place of Seneca, *Primus deorum cultus eſt deos credere, dein reddere illis majeſtatem ſuam, reddere bonitatem, ſine qua nulla majeſtas.*

2. From ſcripture. It were endleſs to produce all thoſe texts wherein greatneſs and glory are aſcribed to God. I ſhall mention two or three. Deut. x. 17. *The Lord is a great God*; Pſal. xxiv. 10. he is called *the King of glory*: ——— civ. 1. he is ſaid to be *cloathed with majeſty and honour. The whole earth is full of his glory.* Hither belong all thoſe doxologies in the Old and New Teſtament, wherein greatneſs, and glory, and majeſty are aſcribed to God.

From all which we may learn,

1. What it is that makes a perſon great and glorious, and what is the way to majeſty, *viz. real worth and excellency*, and particularly, that kind of excellency which creatures are capable of in a very eminent degree, and that is *goodneſs*; this is that which advanceth a perſon, and gives him a pre-eminency above all others; this caſts a luſtre upon a man, and, *makes his face to ſhine.* Ariſtotle tells us, that *ho-*

nour is nothing elſe but the *ſignification of the eſteem which we have of a perſon for his goodneſs; for*, ſaith he, *to be good*, and *to do good, is the higheſt glory*. God's goodneſs is his higheſt glory; and there is nothing ſo glorious in any creature, as herein to be like God.

2. Let us give God the glory which is due to his name; *Aſcribe ye greatneſs to our God*, Deut. xxxii. 3. *Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and power*, Pſal. xxix. 1. The glory and majeſty of God calls for our eſteem and honour, our fear and reverence of him. Thus we ſhould *glorify God in our ſpirits*, by an inward eſteem and reverence of his majeſty. The thoughts of earthly majeſty will compoſe us to reverence: how much more ſhould the apprehenſions of the divine majeſty ſtrike an awe upon our ſpirits in all our addreſſes to him? *His excellency* ſhould *make us afraid*, and keep us from all ſaucy boldneſs and familiarity with him. Reverence is an acknowledgment of the diſtance which is between the majeſty of God, and our meanneſs. And we ſhould *glorify him in our bodies*, with outward worſhip and adoration; that is, by all external ſignifications of reverence and reſpect; and we ſhould glorify him in our lives and actions. The higheſt glory a creature can give to God, is to endeavour to be like him, *ſatis illos coluit, quiſquis imitatus eſt*, Seneca. Hereby we manifeſt and ſhew forth his excellency to the world, when we endeavour to be conformed to the divine perfections. And in caſe of ſin and provocation, we are to give glory to God by repentance, which is an acknowledgment of his holineſs, who hates ſin; and of his juſtice, which will puniſh it; and of the mercy of God, which is ready to pardon it; for it is *the glory of God to paſs by a provocation*.

3. We ſhould take heed of robbing God of his glory, by giving it to any creature, by aſcribing thoſe titles, or that worſhip to any creature, which is due to God alone. This is the reaſon which is given of the ſecond commandment; *I the Lord am a jealous God*. God is jealous of his honour, *and will*

not

not give his glory to another, nor his praiſe to graven images, Iſa. xlii. 8. Upon this account we find the Apoſtle reproves the idolatry of the Heathen, becauſe thereby they debaſed the eſteem of God, and did ſhew they had unworthy thoughts of him, Rom. i. 21. 23. *When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations: and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and fourfooted beaſts, and creeping things.* Hereby they denied the glorious excellency of the divine nature; that is, that he is a ſpirit, and ſo incapable of being repreſented by any material or ſenſible image.

Secondly, I come now to ſpeak of the *ſovereignty* and *dominion* of God: in which I ſhall ſhew,

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by the *ſovereignty* and *dominion* of God. By theſe we mean the full and abſolute right, and title, and authority which God hath to, and over all his creatures, as his creatures, and made by him. And this right reſults from the effects of that goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom, whereby all things are and were made; from whence there doth accrue to God a ſovereign right and title to all his creatures, and a full and abſolute authority over them; that is, ſuch a right and authority, which doth not depend upon any ſuperior, nor is ſubject and accountable to any, for any thing that he does to any of his creatures. And this is that which is called *ſummum imperium*, becauſe there is no power above it to check or controul it; and therefore there can be none greater than this. And it is abſolute, becauſe all the creatures have what they have from God, and all depend upon his goodneſs, and therefore they owe all poſſible duty and perpetual ſubjection, ſo long as they continue in being, becauſe it is ſolely by his power and goodneſs that they continue; and therefore whatever right or title any one can pretend to any perſon or thing, that God hath to all things; *in Deo omnes tituli, omnia jura concurrunt.*

So that ſovereignty and dominion ſignifies a full right and title, and propriety in all his creatures, and

an abſolute authority over them, to govern them and diſpoſe of them, and deal with them in any way he pleaſeth, that is not contrary to his eſſential dignity and perfection, or repugnant to the natural ſtate and condition of the creature.

And for our better underſtanding of this, and the preventing of miſtakes which men are apt to fall into about the ſovereignty of God, I will ſhew,

I. Wherein it doth not conſiſt. And,

II. Wherein it doth conſiſt.

I. Wherein it doth not conſiſt.

1. Not in a right to gratify and delight himſelf in the extreme miſery of innocent and undeſerving creatures: I ſay, not in a *right*; for the *right* that God hath in his creatures, is founded in the benefits he hath conferred upon them, and the obligations they have to him upon that account. Now there is none, who becauſe he hath done a benefit, can have, by virtue of that, a *right* to do a greater evil than the good which he hath done amounts to; and I think it next to madneſs, to doubt whether extreme and eternal miſery be not a greater evil than ſimple being is a good. I know they call it *phyſical goodneſs*; but I do not underſtand how any thing is the better for being called by a hard name. For what can there be that is good or deſirable in being, when it only ſerves to be a foundation of the greateſt and moſt laſting miſery? and we may ſafely ſay, that the juſt God will never challenge more than an equitable right. God doth not claim any ſuch ſovereigny to himſelf, as to cruſh and oppreſs innocent creatures without a cauſe, and to make them miſerable without a provocation. And becauſe it ſeems ſome have been very apt to entertain ſuch groundleſs jealouſies and unworthy thoughts of God, he hath given us his oath to aſſure us of the contrary. *As I live, ſaith the Lord, I have no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn and live.* So far is he from taking pleaſure in the miſery and ruin of innocent creatures, that in caſe of ſin and provocation, he would be much rather pleaſed, if ſinners would, by repentance, avoid and eſcape

eſcape his juſtice, than that they ſhould fall under it. The good God cannot be glorified or pleaſed in doing evil to any, where juſtice doth not require it; nothing is further from infinite goodneſs, than to rejoice in evil. We account him a tyrant and a monſter of men, and of a deviliſh temper, that can do ſo; and we cannot do a greater injury to the good God, than to paint him out after ſuch a horrid and deformed manner.

2. The ſovereignty of God doth not conſiſt in impoſing laws upon his creatures, which are impoſſible either to be underſtood or obſerved by them. For this would not only be contrary to the dignity of the divine nature, but contradict the nature of a reaſonable creature, which, in reaſon, cannot be obliged by any power to impoſſibilities.

3. The ſovereignty of God doth not conſiſt in a liberty to tempt men to evil, or by any inevitable decree to neceſſitate them to ſin, or effectually to procure the ſins of men, and to puniſh them for them. For as this would be contrary to the holineſs, and juſtice, and goodneſs of God, ſo to the nature of a reaſonable creature, who cannot be guilty or deſerve puniſhment for what it cannot help. And men cannot eaſily have a blacker thought of God, than to imagine that he hath, from all eternity, carried on a ſecret deſign to circumvent the greateſt part men into deſtruction, and underhand to draw men into a plot againſt heaven, that by this unworthy practice he may raiſe a revenue of glory to his juſtice. There is no generous and good man, but would ſpit in that man's face, that would charge him with ſuch a deſign; and if they who are but very drops of goodneſs in compariſon of God, the infinite ocean of goodneſs, would take it for ſuch a reproach, ſhall we attribute that to the beſt Being in the world, which we would deteſt and abominate in ourſelves?

II. Wherein the ſovereignty of God doth conſiſt.

1. In a right to diſpoſe of, and deal with his creatures, in any way that doth not contradict the eſſen-

tial

tial perfections of God, and the natural condition of the creature.

2. In a right to impoſe what laws he pleaſeth upon his creatures, whether natural and reaſonable; or poſitive, of trial of obedience; provided they contradict not the nature of God, or of the creature.

3. In a right to inflict due and deſerved puniſhment in a caſe of provocation.

4. In a right to afflict any of his creatures, ſo the evil he inflicts be ſhort of the benefits he hath conferred on them; yea, and farther in a right when he pleaſeth to annihilate the creature, and turn it out of being, if it ſhould ſo ſeem good to him, though that creature have not offended him; becauſe what he gave was his own, and he may without injury take it away again when he pleaſeth. In theſe the ſovereignty of God conſiſts; and if there be any thing elſe that can be reconciled with the eſſential perfections of God.

Secondly, For the proof and confirmation of this. This is univerſally acknowledged by the Heathen, that God is *the Lord and Sovereign of the world, and of all creatures*. Hence Plato calls him, τῶν πάντων ἡγεμόνα; and Tully, *omnium rerum dominum, Lord of all*; and this the ſcripture doth every where attribute to him, calling him *Lord of all, king of kings*, and *Lord of lords*; to which we may refer all thoſe doxologies, in which power, and dominion and authority are aſcribed to God. I will only mention that eminent confeſſion of Nebuchadnezzar, a great king, who, when his underſtanding came to him, was forced to acknowledge that *God was the moſt high*, Dan. iv. 34, 35. I infer,

Firſt, Negatively we cannot, from the ſovereignty of God, infer a right, to do any thing that is unſuitable to the perfection of his nature; and conſequently that we are to reſt ſatisfied with ſuch a notion of dominion and ſovereignty in God, as doth not plainly and directly contradict all the notions that we have of juſtice and goodneſs; nay, it would be little leſs than a horrid and dreadful blaſphemy, to ſay that God can, out of his ſovereign will and pleaſure

pleaſure, do any thing that contradicts the nature of God, and the eſſential perfections of the Deity; or to imagine that the pleaſure and will of the holy, and juſt, and good God, is not always regulated and determined by the eſſential and indiſpenſable laws of goodneſs, and holineſs, and righteouſneſs.

Secondly, Poſitively; we may infer from the ſovereignty and dominion of God,

1. That we ought to own and acknowlege God for our Lord and Sovereign, who by creating us, and giving us all that we have, did create to himſelf a right in us.

2. That we owe to him the utmoſt poſſibility of our love, *to love him with all our hearts, and ſouls, and ſtrength*; becauſe the ſouls that we have, he gave us; and that we are in a capacity to love him, is his gift; and when we render theſe to him, we do but give him of his own.

3. We owe to him all imaginable ſubjection, and obſervance, and obedience; and are with all diligence, to the utmoſt of our endeavours, to conform ourſelves to his will, and to thoſe laws which he hath impoſed upon us.

4. In caſe of offence and diſobedience, we are, without murmuring, to ſubmit to what he ſhall inflict upon us, *to accept of the puniſhment of our iniquity*, and *patiently to bear the indignation of the Lord*, becauſe we have ſinned againſt him, who is *our Lord and Sovereign*.

SERMON CXXXVII.

The wiſdom of God in the creation of the world.

PSAL. civ. 24.

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all.

I Am treating of the attributes and properties of God, particularly thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, which I told you are his knowledge and wiſdom. I have finiſhed the firſt, the knowledge of God. The laſt day I ſpake concerning the wiſdom of God in general; but there are three eminent arguments and famous inſtances of God's wiſdom, which I have reſerved for a more large and particular handling. The wiſdom of God ſhines forth in the creation of the world, in the government of it, and in the redemption of mankind by Jeſus Chriſt. Of theſe three I ſhall ſpeak ſeverally.

I begin with the firſt, the argument of God's wiſdom, which the creation doth furniſh us withal. In this viſible frame of the world, which we behold with our eyes, which way ſoever we look, we are encountered with ocular demonſtrations of the wiſdom of God. What the Apoſtle ſaith of the power of God is likewiſe true of his wiſdom, Rom. i. 20. *The inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead:* So the eternal wiſdom of God is underſtood *by the things which are made.* Now the creation is an argument of the wiſdom of God, as it is an effect of admi-

admirable counſel and wiſdom. As any curious work, or rare engine doth argue the wit of the artificer; ſo the variety, and order, and regularity, and fitneſs of the works of God, argue the infinite wiſdom of him who made them; a work ſo beautiful and magnificent, ſuch a ſtately pile as heaven and earth is, ſo curious in the ſeveral pieces of it, ſo harmonious in all its parts, every part ſo fitted to the ſervice of the whole, and each part for the ſervice of another; is not this a plain argument that there was infinite wiſdom in the contrivance of this frame?

Now I ſhall endeavour to prove to you, that this frame of things which we ſee with our eyes, which we call the world or the creation, is contrived after the beſt manner, and hath upon it evident impreſſions of counſel and wiſdom. I grant the wiſdom of God is infinite, and that many of the ends and deſigns of his wiſdom are *unſearchable, and paſt finding out*, both in the works of creation and providence: and that *though a wiſe man ſeek to find out the work of God from the beginning to the end, he ſhall not be able to do it*; and we ſhall never be able to exhauſt all the various wiſdom and contrivance which is in the works of God; though the oftner, and the nearer we meditate upon them, the more we ſhall ſee to admire in them; the more we ſtudy this book of the creation, the more we ſhall be aſtoniſhed at the wiſdom of the author: but this doth not hinder, but that we may diſcover ſomething of the wiſdom of God, though it be infinite. As the effects of infinite power may fall under our ſenſes, ſo the deſigns of infinite wiſdom may fall under our reaſon and underſtanding; and when things appear to our beſt reaſon plainly to be ordered for the beſt, and the greateſt advantages of the world and mankind, ſo far as we are able to judge; and if they had been otherwiſe, as they might have been a hundred thouſand ways, they would not have been ſo well; we ought to conclude, that things are thus, and not otherwiſe, is the reſult of wiſdom.

Now the wiſdom of God in the creation will appear by conſidering the works of God. Thoſe who have

have ſtudied nature, can diſcourſe theſe things more exactly and particularly. It would require perfect skill in aſtronomy, to declare the motions and order of heavenly bodies; and in anatomy, to read lectures of the rare contrivance of the bodies of living creatures. But this, as it is beyond my ability, ſo it would probably be above moſt of your capacities; therefore I ſhall content myſelf with ſome general and more obvious inſtances of the divine wiſdom, which ſhine forth ſo clear in his works, that *he that runs may read it.*

1. I ſhall take a ſhort ſurvey of the ſeveral parts of the world.

2. Single out man, the maſter-piece of the viſible creation.

1. If we ſurvey the world, and travel over the ſeveral parts of it in our thoughts, we ſhall find that all things in it are made with the greateſt exactneſs, ranged in the moſt beautiful order, and ſerve the wiſeſt and beſt ends.

If we look up to heaven, and take notice only there of what is moſt viſible, the ſun, you ſee, how by the wiſe order and conſtancy of its courſe it makes day and night, winter and ſummer. This the Pſalmiſt takes notice of, Pſal. xix. 1, 2. *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament ſheweth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth ſpeech; and night unto night ſheweth knowledge.* It may eaſily be imagined many ways, how the ſun might have had another courſe in reference to the earth; but no man can deviſe any other, that ſhould not be very much to the prejudice of the world; ſo that this being the beſt, it is an argument that wiſdom had the ordering and diſpoſing of it.

If we look down to the earth, we ſhall ſee *gods aſcending and deſcending*; I mean clear repreſentations of divine wiſdom in the treaſures that are hid in the bowels of it, and thoſe fruits that grow upon the ſurface of it. What vaſt heaps, and what variety of uſeful materials and minerals are ſcattered up and down in the earth as one would think with a careleſs hand, but yet ſo wiſely diſperſed, as is moſt pro-

proper for the neceſſities and uſes of ſeveral countries! Look upon the ſurface of the earth, and you ſhall find it cloathed and adorned with plants of various and admirable frame, and beauty, and uſefulneſs. Look upon the vaſt ocean, and there you may ſee the wiſdom of God in bridling and reſtraining that unruly element, I mean, in ſinking it below the earth; whereas the water might have been above and covered the earth, and then the earth had been in a great meaſure uſeleſs, and incapable of thoſe inhabitants which now poſſeſs it.

Look again upon the earth, and in the air, and ſea, and you ſhall find all theſe inhabited and furniſhed with great ſtore of living creatures of ſeveral kinds, wonderfully made in the frame of their bodies, endued with ſtrong inclinations to increaſe their kinds, and with a natural affection and care towards their young ones, and every kind of theſe creatures armed either with ſtrength or wit to oppoſe their enemy, or ſwiftneſs to fly from him, or ſtrong holds to ſecure themſelves. But the creation is a vaſt field, in which we may eaſily loſe ourſelves. I ſhall therefore call home our wandering thoughts, for we need not go out of ourſelves for a proof of divine wiſdom. I ſhall therefore,

2. Select the choiceſt piece of it, man, who is the top and perfection of this viſible world. What is ſaid of the elephant, or *behemoth*, Job xl. 19. in reſpect of the vaſt bigneſs and ſtrength of his body, is only abſolutely true of man, that he is *divini opificii caput, the chief of the works of God, and upon earth there is none like him.* Man is *mundi utriuſque nexus, the bond of both worlds*, as Scaliger calls him, in whom the world of bodies, and the world of ſpirits do meet, and unite; for in reſpect of his body, he is related to this viſible world, and is of the earth; but in reſpect of his ſoul, he is allied to heaven, and deſcended from above. We have looked above us, and beneath us, and about us, upon the ſeveral repreſentations of God's wiſdom, and the ſeveral parts of the creation; but we have not yet conſidered the beſt piece of the

viſible world, which we may ſpeak of, without flattery of ourſelves, and to the praiſe of our Maker. God when he had made the world, *he made man after his own image.* When he had finiſhed the other part of the creation, he was pleaſed to ſet up this picture of himſelf in it, as a memorial of the workman. Now we ſhall a little more particularly conſider this piece of God's workmanſhip, being it is better known, and more familiar to us, as it is more excellent than the reſt, and conſequently a higher inſtance of the divine wiſdom. It is obſerved by ſome, that concerning the parts of the creation, God ſpeaks the word, *Let there be light,* and *Let there be a firmament, and there was ſo:* but when he comes to make man, he doth, as it were, deliberate, and enter into conſultation about him. *And God ſaid, let us make man in our image, after our likeneſs; and let him have dominion,* Gen. i. 26. as if man, above all the reſt, were the effect and reſult of divine wiſdom, and the creature of his counſel.

Man may be conſidered either in himſelf, and in reſpect of the parts of which he conſiſts, ſoul and body; or with relation to the univerſe, and other parts of the creation.

1. Conſider him in himſelf, as compounded of ſoul and body. Conſider man in his outward and worſe part, and you ſhall find that to be admirable, even to aſtoniſhment; in reſpect of which, the Pſalmiſt cries out, Pſal. cxxxix. 14. *I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my ſoul knoweth right well.* The frame of our bodies is ſo curiouſly wrought, and every part of it ſo full of miracle, that Galen (who was otherwiſe backward enough to the belief of a God) when he had anatomiſed man's body, and carefully ſurveyed the frame of it, viewed the fitneſs and uſefulneſs of every part of it, and the many ſeveral intentions of every little vein, and bone, and muſcle, and the beauty of the whole; he fell into a pang of devotion, and wrote a hymn to his Creator. And thoſe excellent books of his, *de uſu partium,*

of

of the uſefulneſs and convenient contrivance of every part of the body, are a moſt exact demonſtration of the divine wiſdom, which appears in the make of our body; of which books, Gaſſendus ſaith, the whole work is writ with a kind of enthuſiaſm. The wiſdom of God, in the frame of our bodies, very much appears by a curious conſideration of the ſeveral parts of it; but that requiring a very accurate skill in anatomy, I chuſe rather wholly to forbear it, than by my unskilfulneſs to be injurious to the divine wiſdom.

But this *domicilium corporis, the houſe of our body*, though it be indeed a curious piece; yet it is nothing to the noble inhabitant that dwells in it. This cabinet, though it be exquiſitely wrought, and very rich; yet it comes infinitely ſhort in value of the jewel that is hid and laid up in it! How does the glorious faculty of reaſon and underſtanding exalt us above the reſt of the creatures! Nature hath not made that particular proviſion for man, which it hath made for other creatures, becauſe it hath provided for him in general, in giving him a mind and reaſon. Man is not born cloathed, nor armed with any conſiderable weapon for defence; but he hath reaſon and underſtanding to provide theſe things for himſelf; and this alone excells all the advantages of other creatures: he can keep himſelf warmer and ſafer; he can foreſee dangers, and provide againſt them; he can provide weapons that are better than horns, and teeth, and paws, and by the advantage of his reaſon, is too hard for all other creatures, and can defend himſelf againſt their violence.

If we conſider the mind of man yet nearer, how many arguments of divinity are there in it! That there ſhould be at once in our underſtandings diſtinct comprehenſions of ſuch variety of objects; that it ſhould paſs in its thoughts from heaven to earth in a moment, and retain the memory of things paſt, and take a proſpect of the future, and look forward as far as eternity! Becauſe we are familiar to ourſelves, we cannot be ſtrange and wonderful to ourſelves;

but the great miracle of the world, is the mind of man, and the contrivance of it an eminent inſtance of God's wiſdom.

2. Conſider man with relation to the univerſe, and you ſhall find the wiſdom of God doth appear, in that all things are made ſo uſeful for man, who was deſigned to be the chief inhabitant of this viſible world, the gueſt whom God deſigned principally to entertain in this houſe which he built. Not that we are to think, that God hath ſo made all things for man, that he hath not made them at all for himſelf, and poſſibly for many other uſes than we can imagine; for we much over-value ourſelves, if we think them to be only for us; and we diminiſh the wiſdom of God, in reſtraining it to one end: but the chief and principal end of many things is the uſe and ſervice of man; and in reference to this end, you ſhall find that God hath made abundant and wiſe proviſion.

More particularly we will conſider man,

1. In his natural capacity, as a part of the world. How many things are there in the world for the ſervice and pleaſure, for the uſe and delight of man, which, if man were not in the world, would be of little uſe? Man is by nature a contemplative creature, and God has furniſhed him with many objects to exerciſe his underſtanding upon, which would be ſo far uſeleſs and loſt, if man were not. Who ſhould obſerve the motions of the ſtars, and the courſes of thoſe heavenly bodies, and all the wonders of nature? Who ſhould pry into the ſecret virtues of plants, and other natural things, if there were not in the world, a creature endued with reaſon and underſtanding? Would the beaſts of the field ſtudy aſtronomy, or turn chymiſts, and try experiments in nature?

What variety of beautiful plants and flowers is there, which can be imagined to be of little other uſe but for the pleaſure of man. And if man had not been, they would have loſt their grace, and been trod down by the beaſts of the field, without pity or obſervation; they would not have made

made them into garlands and noſegays. How many ſorts of fruits are there which grow upon high trees, out of the reach of beaſts! and indeed they take no pleaſure in them. What would all the vaſt bodies of trees have ſerved for, if man had not been to build with them, and make dwellings of them? Of what uſe would all the mines of metal have been, and of coal, and the quarries of ſtone? Would the mole have admired the fine gold? Would the beaſts of the foreſt have built themſelves palaces, or would they have made fires in their dens?

2. Conſider man in his geographical capacity, as I may call it, in relation to his habitation in this or that climate or country. The wiſdom of God hath ſo ordered things, that the neceſſities of every country are ſupplied one way or other. Egypt hath no rains; but the river Nilus overflows it, and makes it fruitful. Under the line, where there are exceſſive heats, every day there are conſtant gales and breezes of cool wind, to fan and refreſh the ſcorched inhabitants. The hotter countries are furniſhed with materials for ſilk, a light cloathing; we that are cooler here in England, with materials for cloth, a warmer cloathing; Ruſſia and Muſcovy, which are extreme cold, are provided with warm furrs, and skins of beaſts.

3. Conſider man in his capacity of commerce and intercourſe. Man is a ſociable creature; beſides the advantages of commerce with remoter nations, for ſupplying every country with thoſe conveniencies and commodities, which each doth peculiarly afford. And here the wiſdom of God does plainly appear, in diſpoſing the ſea into ſeveral parts of the world, for the more ſpeedy commerce and intercourſe of ſeveral nations. Now if every country had brought forth all commodities, *that* had been needleſs and ſuperfluous, becauſe they might have been had without commerce; beſides, that the great encouragement of intercourſe among nations, which is ſo agreeable to human nature, would have been taken away: If every country had been, as now it is, deſtitute of many things other countries have, and there had been no ſea to

give an opportunity of traffick, the world had been very defective as to the uſe of man. Now here appears the wiſdom of God, that the world, and all things in it, are contrived for the beſt.

Thus I have endeavoured to do ſomething toward the diſplaying of God's wiſdom in the workmanſhip of the world; although I am very ſenſible how much I have been maſtered and oppreſſed by the greatneſs and weight of ſo noble an argument. For *who can declare the works of God! and who can ſhew forth all his praiſe!*

The uſe I ſhall make of what has been ſaid, ſhall be in three particulars:

1. This confutes the Epicureans, who impute the world, and this orderly and beautiful frame of things to chance. Thoſe things which are the proper effects of counſel, and bear the plain impreſſions of wiſdom upon them, ought not to be attributed to chance. What a madneſs is it to grant all things to be as well made, as if the wiſeſt agent upon counſel and deſign had contrived them; and yet to aſcribe them to chance! Now he that denies things to be ſo wiſely framed, muſt pick holes in the creation, and ſhew ſome fault and irregularity in the frame of things, which no man ever yet pretended to do. Did ever any anatomiſt pretend to ſhew how the body of a man might have been better contrived, and fitter for the uſes of a reaſonable creature than it is, or any aſtronomer to rectify the courſe of the ſun? As for the extravagant and blaſphemous ſpeech of Alphonſus, *That if he had ſtood at God's elbow when he made the world, he could have told him how to have made it better*; beſides his pride, it ſhews nothing but his ignorance; that he built his aſtronomy upon a falſe hypotheſis, as is generally believed now by the learned in that ſcience; and no wonder he found fault with the world, when he miſtook the frame of it: But thoſe who have been moſt verſed in nature, and have moſt pried into the ſecrets of it, have moſt admired the workmanſhip both of the great world, and the leſs.

But if we muſt ſuppoſe the world to be as well made as

as wiſdom could contrive it, which is generally granted; it is a monſtrous folly to impute it to chance. A man might better ſay, Archimedes did not make any of his engines by skill, but by chance; and might more eaſily maintain, that Cardinal Richlieu did not manage affairs by any arts or policy, but they fell out by mere chance. What pitiful ſhifts is Epicurus put to, when the beſt account he can give of the world, is this; *That matter always was, and the parts of it in motion, and after a great many trials, the parts of matter at length hampered themſelves in this fortunate order wherein they now are; that men, at firſt, grew out of the earth, were nouriſhed by the navel-ſtring, and when they were ſtrong enough, broke looſe and weaned themſelves: that the noſtrils were made by the waters making themſelves a paſſage out of the body; and the ſtomach and bowels by the waters forcing a paſſage downwards, that the members of the body were not made for thoſe uſes for which they ſerve, but chanced to be ſo, and the uſes afterwards found out.* Is it worth the while to advance ſuch ſenſeleſs opinions as theſe, to deny the wiſdom of God? Is it not much eaſier, and more reaſonable to ſay, that the wiſdom of God made all theſe things, than to trouble ourſelves to imagine how all things ſhould happen thus conveniently by chance? Did you ever know any great work, in which there was variety of parts, and an orderly diſpoſition of them required, done by chance, and without the direction of wiſdom and counſel? How long time might a man take to jumble a ſet of four and twenty letters together, before they would fall out to be an exact poem; yea, or to make a book of tolerable ſenſe, though but in proſe? How long might a man ſprinkle oil and colours upon canvas, with a careleſs hand, before this would produce the exact picture of a man? And is a man eaſier made by chance than his picture? He that tells me that this great and curious frame of the world was made by chance, I could much more believe him if he ſhould tell me that Henry the VII's chapel in Weſtminſter was not built by any mortal man, but the ſtones did grow in thoſe forms into which they ſeem

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to us to be cut and graven; that the ſtones, and timber, and iron, and braſs, and all the other materials came hither by chance, and upon a day met all happily together, and put themſelves into that delicate order, in which we ſee them ſo cloſe compacted, that it muſt be a great chance that parts them again. Now, is it not much eaſier to imagine how a skilful workman ſhould raiſe a building, than how timber and ſtones, and how that variety of materials, which is required to a great and ſtately building, ſhould meet together all of a juſt bigneſs, and exactly fitted, and by chance take their places, and range themſelves into that order? I inſiſt the longer upon this, becauſe I am ſenſible how much atheiſm hath gained in this age.

2. Let us admire and adore, and praiſe the *wiſdom* of God, *who hath eſtabliſhed the world by his wiſdom; and ſtretched out the heavens by his underſtanding; who hath made all things in number, weight and meaſure*; that is, by exact *wiſdom*. The wiſe works of God are the proper object of our praiſe; and this is a day proper for the work of praiſe and thankſgiving. Now under the goſpel, ſince Chriſt was clearly revealed, we have new matter of praiſe and thankſgiving; but as God has given us Chriſt, ſo he hath given us beings. We are not ſo to remember our Redeemer, as to forget our Creator. The goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom of God, which appears in the creation of the world, ought ſtill to be matter of admiration and praiſe to Chriſtians. It is a great fault and neglect among Chriſtians, that they are not more taken up with the works of God, and the contemplation of the wiſdom which ſhines forth in them. We are apt enough to admire other things, little toys; but we overlook this vaſt curious engine of the world, and the great Artificer of all things. It was truly ſaid by one, that moſt men are ſo ſtupid and inconſiderate, as to admire the works of a painter or a carver more than the works of God. There are many that have beſtowed more eloquence in the praiſe of a curious picture, or an exact building, than ever they did upon this noble and exquiſite

frame

frame of the world, or any of the other works of God. We can admire the wiſdom, and deſign, and ſkill of petty artiſts, and little engineers; but *here is wiſdom* in the beauty and order of the creation. Did we love God, and take pleaſure in the effects of his wiſdom and power, we ſhould be more in the contemplation of them. Pſal. cxi. 2. *The works of the Lord are great, ſought out of all them that have pleaſure therein:* Let us then ſay with the Pſalmiſt, O *Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches,* &c.

More particularly let us, with an humble thankfulneſs, admire the wiſdom which hath made and diſpoſed all things ſo fitly for our uſe and ſervice, and with ſo merciful a reſpect to us: the light and influence of heaven; the beaſts and the fruits of the earth. We find the Pſalmiſt often praiſing God upon this account, Pſal. cxxxvi. 4, 5. *&c.* The wiſdom which hath framed theſe bodies of ours, Pſal. cxxxix. 14, 15, 16. which hath endowed us with knowledge and underſtanding. Elihu complains, that men were apt to overlook theſe great bleſſings of God, Job xxxv. 10, 11, 12. *But none ſaith, Where is God my maker, who giveth ſongs in the night? who teacheth us more than the beaſts of earth, and maketh us wiſer than the fowls of heaven. There they cry, but none giveth anſwer, becauſe of the pride of evil men.*

3. *Uſe.* Truſt the wiſdom of God, which made the world to govern it, and the affairs of it; and the wiſdom which hath framed thy body in ſo curious and exquiſite a manner, and formed thy ſpirit within thee, and hath made ſo many creatures with reference to thy neceſſity and comfort, truſt him for thy future proviſion. Matth. vi. 25. *I ſay unto you, take no thought for your lives, what ye ſhall eat,* &c. *Is not the life more than meat? and the body than raiment?* He hath given us our ſouls; he hath breathed into us the breath of life, and made theſe bodies without our care and thought; he hath done the greater, will he not do the leſs? When thou art ready anxiouſly and ſolicitouſly to ſay, what ſhall

I do for the neceſſaries of life? Conſider whence thou didſt receive thy life, who made this body of thine; thou mayeſt be aſſured, that the wiſdom which hath created theſe, conſidered how to ſupply them; the wiſdom of God knew that you would want all theſe, and hath accordingly provided for them, therefore *fear not.*

SERMON CXXXVIII.

The wiſdom of God in his providence.

1 PETER v. 7.

Caſting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.

Preached at Kenſington.

AMongſt the ſeveral duties which, towards the concluſion of this epiſtle, the Apoſtle exhorts Chriſtians to, this is one, not to be over-much ſolicitous and concerned about what may befal us, but to refer ourſelves to the providence of God, which takes care of us. In ſpeaking to this argument, I ſhall,

I. Conſider the nature of the duty here required, which is to *caſt our care upon God.*

II. The argument uſed to perſuade us to it: Becauſe *he careth for us.*

I. For the nature of the duty here required. The word μέριμνα ſignifies an *anxious care* about events, a care that is accompanied with trouble and diſquiet of mind about what may befal us; about the good that we hope for and deſire, or about the evil which we fear may come upon us. This the Apoſtle exhorts us to throw off; and to leave to the providence of God, and his care, all thoſe events which we are

apt

apt to be ſo ſollicitous and diſquieted about. The expreſſion ſeems to be taken out of Pſal. lv. 22. *Caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and he ſhall ſuſtain thee.*

Now that we may not miſtake our duty in this matter, I ſhall ſhew what is not here meant by *caſting all our care upon God*; and then what is meant by it.

The Apoſtle doth not here intend to take men off from a provident care and diligence about the concernments of this life; this is not only contrary to reaſon, but to many expreſs precepts and paſſages of ſcripture, wherein diligence is recommended to us, and the bleſſing of God, and the good ſucceſs of our affairs promiſed thereto; wherein we are commanded to provide for thoſe of our family, which cannot be done without ſome ſort of care; and wherein ſlothfulneſs and negligence are condemned, and threatened with poverty: ſo that this is not *to caſt our care upon God*, to take no care of ourſelves, to uſe no diligence and endeavour for the obtaining of the good which we deſire, and the prevention of the evil we fear; this is to tempt the providence of God, and to caſt that burden upon him, which he expects we ſhould bear ourſelves.

But by *caſting our care upon God*, the Apoſtle intends theſe two things:

1. That after all prudent care and diligence have been uſed by us, we ſhould not be farther ſolicitous, nor trouble ourſelves about the event of things, which, when we have done all we can, will be out of our power. And this certainly is our Saviour's meaning, when he bids us *take no care for the morrow*. When we have done what is fit for us for the preſent to do, we ſhould not diſquiet and torment ourſelves about the iſſue and event of things.

2. *Caſting our care upon God*, implies, that we ſhould refer the iſſue of things to his providence, which is continually vigilant over us, and knows how to diſpoſe all things to the beſt; entirely confiding in his wiſdom and goodneſs, that he will order all things for our good, and in that confidence reſolving to reſt ſatisfied

ſatisfied and contented with the diſpoſals of his providence whatever they be.

You ſee then the nature of the duty which the Apoſtle here exhorts to, *viz.* That after all prudent care and diligence have been uſed on our parts, we ſhould not be diſquieted in our minds about the event of things, but leave them to God, who hath the care of us, and of all our concernments. Which is the

II. Thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, and which I intend chiefly to inſiſt upon, *viz.* The argument which the Apoſtle here uſeth to perſuade us to this duty, of *caſting all our care upon God*, becauſe *it is he that careth for us*: and this implies in it theſe two things:

1. In general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events that happen to us.

2. More particularly, that this providence is peculiarly concerned for good men, and that he takes a ſpecial care of them and their concerns; *he careth for you.* The Apoſtle ſpeaks this to them, not only as men, but as Chriſtians. And thus the Pſalmiſt, from whom theſe words ſeem to be taken, does apply and limit this promiſe; *Caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and he ſhall ſuſtain thee; he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved.*

1. That God taketh care of us, implies in general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events that happen to us. I ſhall not now enter upon a large proof of the providence of God; that is too large and intricate an argument for a ſhort diſcourſe, and hath a great deal of nicety and difficulty in it; and though it be a fundamental principle of religion, and hath been almoſt generally entertained and believed by mankind, and that upon very good reaſon: yet becauſe the vindication of many particular appearances of providence, does in a great meaſure depend upon a full view and comprehenſion of the whole deſign, therefore we muſt neceſſarily refer ourſelves for full ſatisfaction, as to ſeveral difficulties and objections, to the other world, when we

ſhall

ſhall ſee God's works, together with the relation of every part to the whole deſign, and then many particular paſſages, which may now ſeem odd and crooked, as we look upon them by themſelves, will in relation to the whole appear to have a great deal of reaſon and regularity in them.

Therefore I ſhall at preſent only briefly, and in the general, ſhew that it is very credible, that there is a wiſe providence that governs the world, and intereſts itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events which happen to us.

And I deſire it may be obſerved in the entrance upon this argument, that the handling of this queſtion concerning providence, doth ſuppoſe the *being of God*, and that he *made the world*, as principles already known and granted, before we come to diſpute of his providence; for it would be in vain to argue about the providence of God, with thoſe who queſtion his being, and whether *the world was made by him*: But ſuppoſing theſe two principles, *that God is*, and *that he made the world*, it is very credible that he ſhould take care of the government of it, and eſpecially of one of the nobleſt parts of it, the race of mankind. For we cannot believe, that he, who employed ſo much power and wiſdom in the raiſing of this great and magnificent pile, and furniſhing every part of it with ſuch variety of creatures, ſo exquiſitely, and ſo wiſely fitted for the uſe and ſervice of one another, ſhould ſo ſoon as he had perfected it, forſake his own workmanſhip, and take no further care of it; eſpecially conſidering that it is no trouble and diſquiet to him, either to take notice of what is done here below, or to interpoſe for the regulating of any diſorders that may happen; for infinite knowledge, and wiſdom, and power can do this with all imaginable eaſe, knows all things, and can do all things, without any diſturbance of its own happineſs.

And this hath always been the common apprehenſion of mankind, that God knows all things and obſerves every thing that is done in the world, and when he pleaſeth, interpoſes in the affairs of it. It

is true indeed, the Epicureans did deny that God either made the world or governs it; and therefore wiſe men always doubted whether they did indeed believe the being of God, or not; but being unwilling to incur the danger of ſo odious an opinion; they were content, for faſhion ſake, to own his being, provided they might take away the beſt and moſt ſubſtantial arguments for the proof of it. The reſt of the Philoſophers owned a providence, at leaſt a general providence, that took care of great and more important matters, but did not deſcend to a conſtant and particular care of every perſon; and every little event belonging to them, *Interdum curioſus ſingulorum*, ſays Tully; *Now and then when he pleaſes, he takes care of particular perſons, and their leſſer concernments*; but many of them thought that God did generally neglect the ſmaller and more inconſiderable affairs of the world, *Dii minora negligunt, neque agellos ſingulorum & viticulas perſequuntur, The Gods overlook ſmaller matters, and do not mind every man's little field and vine.* Such imperfect apprehenſions had they of the providence of God. And though they would ſeem hereby to conſult the dignity and eaſe of the Deity, by exempting him from the care and trouble of leſſer matters, yet, in truth and reality, they caſt a diſhonourable reflexion upon him, as if it were a burden to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodneſs, to take care of every thing.

But now divine revelation hath put this matter out of doubt, by aſſuring us of God's particular care of all perſons and events. Our Saviour tells us, that God's providence extends to the leaſt and moſt inconſiderable creatures, *To the graſs of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is caſt into the oven*, Mat. vi. 30. *To the fowls of the air*, and that to the leaſt of them, even to *the ſparrows, two of which are ſold for a farthing, and yet not one of them falleth to the ground without God*, Mat. x. 29. Much more doth the providence of God extend to men, which are creatures far more conſiderable, and to the very leaſt thing that belongs to us, *to the very hairs of our head*, which

which are all numbred; the loweſt inſtance that can be thought on.

So that the light of nature owns a more general providence; and divine revelation hath rectified thoſe imperfect apprehenſions which men had about it, and hath ſatisfied us, that it extends itſelf to all particulars, and even to the leaſt things and moſt inconſiderable. And this is no ways incredible, conſidering the infinite perfection of the divine nature, in reſpect of which, God can with as much and greater eaſe take care of every thing, than we can do of any one thing; and the belief of this is the great foundation of religion. Men therefore pray to God for the good they want, and to be freed from the evils they fear, becauſe they believe that he always regards and hears them. Men therefore make conſcience of their duty, becauſe they believe God obſerves them, and will reward and puniſh their good and evil deeds. So that take away the providence of God, and we pull down one of the main pillars upon which religion ſtands; we rob ourſelves of one of the greateſt comforts, and beſt refuges in the afflictions and calamities of this life, and of all our hopes of happineſs in the next.

And though there be many diſorders in the world, eſpecially in the affairs of man, the moſt irregular and intractable piece of God's creation; yet this is far from being a ſufficient objection againſt the providence of God, if we conſider that God made man a free creature, and capable of abuſing his liberty, and intends this preſent life for a ſtate of trial in order to another, where men ſhall receive the juſt recompence of their actions here? And then if we conſider that many of the evils and diſorders, which God permits to happen, are capable of being overruled by him to a greater good, and are made many times to ſerve wiſe and excellent purpoſes, and that the providence of God does ſometimes viſibly and remarkably interpoſe, for the prevention and remedy of great diſorders and confuſions; I ſay, conſidering all this, it is no blemiſh to the divine providence, to permit many of theſe irregularities

which are in the world, and ſuffer the fates of good and bad men to be ſo croſs and unequal in this life. For ſuppoſing another life after this, wherein men ſhall come to an account, and every man ſhall receive the juſt recompence of his actions, there will then be a proper ſeaſon and full opportunity of ſetting all things ſtraight, and no man ſhall have reaſon then, either to glory in his wickedneſs, or to complain of his ſufferings in this world. This is the firſt, that God's providence governs the world, and intereſts itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events that happen to them; and this is a very good reaſon why we ſhould *caſt* our particular *cares upon him*, who hath undertaken the government of the whole.

2. The providence of God is more peculiarly concerned for good men, and he takes a more particular and eſpecial care of them. The Apoſtle ſpeaks this to Chriſtians, *Caſt all your care on him, for he careth for you.* And this David limits in a more peculiar manner to good men; *Caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and he will ſuſtain thee; he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved.*

The providence of God many times preſerves good men from thoſe evils which happen to others, and by a peculiar and remarkable interpoſition, reſcues them out of thoſe calamities which it ſuffers others to fall into; and God many times bleſſeth good men with remarkable proſperity and ſucceſs in their affairs. To which purpoſe there are innumerable declarations and promiſes in the holy ſcriptures, ſo well known, that I ſhall not trouble you with the recital of them.

Notwithſtanding which, it cannot be denied, that good men fall into many evils, and are haraſſed with great afflictions in this world: but then the providence of God uſually ordereth it ſo, that they are armed with great patience to bear them, and find great comfort and ſupport under them, and make better uſe and improvement of them than others; ſo that one way or other they turn to their advantage. So the Apoſtle aſſures us, Rom. viii.

28. *We*

28. *We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.* All the evils and afflictions which happen to good men, conſpire one way or other to the promoting of their happineſs, many times in this world, to be ſure they make a great addition to it in the other. So the ſame Apoſtle tells us, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilſt we look not,* &c. And can we ſay God's providence neglects us, when he rewards our temporal ſufferings with eternal glory: when *through many hardſhips and tribulations,* he at laſt brings us to *a kingdom?* Was Joſeph neglected by God, when by a great deal of hard uſage, and a long impriſonment, he was raiſed to the higheſt dignity in a great kingdom? Or rather was not the providence of God very remarkable towards him, in making thoſe ſufferings ſo many ſteps to his glory, and the occaſion of his advancement? And is not God's providence towards good men as kind and as remarkable, in bringing them to an infinitely better and more glorious kingdom, by tribulations and ſufferings; and making *our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?*

Thus you ſee what is implied in God's care of us in general; that he governs the world, and diſpoſeth all events; and particularly, that he is peculiarly concerned for good men, and takes a more eſpecial care of them. Let us now ſee of what force this conſideration is, to perſuade to the duty enjoined in the text, *to caſt all your care upon God;* that is, after all prudent care and diligence hath been uſed on our part, not to be anxious and ſolicitous about the event of things, but to leave that to God. Now this conſideration, that *God cares for us,* ſhould be an argument to us, *to caſt all our care upon him,* upon theſe two accounts:

1. Becauſe if *God cares for us,* our concernments are in the beſt and ſafeſt hands.

2. Becauſe all our anxiety and ſolicitude will do us no good.

1. Becauſe if *God cares for us*, our concernments are in the beſt and ſafeſt hands, and where we ſhould deſire to have them; infinitely ſafer than under any care and conduct of our own. And this ought to be a great ſatisfaction to our minds, and to free us from all diſquieting thoughts; for if God undertakes the care of us, then we are ſure that nothing ſhall happen to us, but by the diſpoſal or permiſſion of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs. There are many things indeed, which to us ſeem chance and accident; but in reſpect of God, they are providence and deſign; they may appear to happen by chance, or may proceed from the ill-will and malicious intent of ſecond cauſes, but they are all wiſely deſigned; and as they are appointed or permitted by God, they are the reſult of the deepeſt counſel, and the greateſt goodneſs. And can we wiſh that we and our concernments ſhould be in better and ſafer hands, than of infinite power and wiſdom, in conjunction with infinite love and goodneſs? And if we be careful to do our duty, and to demean ourſelves towards God as we ought, we may reſt aſſured of his love and care of us; and if we do in good earneſt believe the providence of God, we cannot but think that he hath a peculiar regard to thoſe that love and ſerve him, and that he will take a peculiar care of their concernments, and that he can, and will diſpoſe them better for us, than we could manage them ourſelves, if we were left to ourſelves, and our affairs were put into *the hands of our own counſel*.

Put the caſe we had the entire ordering and diſpoſal of ourſelves, what were reaſonable for us to do in this caſe? We would ſurely, according to our beſt wiſdom and judgment, do the beſt we could for ourſelves; and when upon experience of our own manifold ignorance and weakneſs, we had found our weightieſt affairs and deſigns frequently to miſcarry, for want of foreſight, or power, or skill, to obviate and prevent the infinite hazards and diſappoint-

pointments which human affairs are liable to, we should then look about us; and if we knew any person much wiser, and more powerful than ourselves, who, we believed did heartily love us, and wish well to us, we would out of kindness to ourselves, ask his counsel in our affairs, and crave his assistance; and if we could prevail with him to undertake the care of our concernments, we would commit them all to his conduct and government, in confidence of his great wisdom and good-will to us.

Now God is such an one, he loves us as well as we do ourselves, and desires our happiness as much, and knows infinitely better than we do, what means are most conducing to it, and will most effectually secure it. And every man that believes thus of God, (as every man must do, that believes there is a God, for these are the natural and essential notions which all men have of the Deity) I say, every man that believes thus of God; the first thing he would do, (if he knew not already that God had voluntarily, and of his own accord, undertaken the care of him and of his affairs) would be to apply himself to God, and to beseech him with all earnestness and importunity, that he would permit him to refer his concernments to him, and be pleased to undertake the care of them; and he would, without any demur or difficulty, give up himself wholly to him, to guide and govern him, and to dispose of him as to him should seem best.

Now if God have prevented us herein, and without our desire taken this care upon himself, we ought to rejoice in it, as the greatest happiness that could possibly have befallen us; and we should, without any farther care and anxiety, using our own best diligence, and studying to please him, chearfully leave ourselves in his hands, with the greatest confidence and security, that he will do all that for us which is really best; and with a firm persuasion, that that condition, and those circumstances of life, which he shall choose for us, will be no other but the very same which we would choose for ourselves, if we were as wise as he.

And

And it is ſo natural for men to think thus of God, that the very heathen Poet had the ſame idea of him, and upon that ground, adviſeth us to commit all our concernments to him.

Permittes ipſis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebuſque ſit utile noſtris;
Nam pro jucundis, aptiſſima quaque dabunt di;
Charior eſt illis homo, quàm ſibi.

"Leave it (ſays he) to the wiſer gods, to conſider "and determine what is fitteſt for thee, and moſt "for thy advantage; and though they do not always "give thee what thou deſireſt, and that which plea-"ſeth thee beſt, yet they will give that which is moſt "fit and convenient for thee; for man is more dear "to the gods, than he is to himſelf." Not much different from this, is the divine counſel of Solomon, Prov. iii. 5, 6. *Truſt in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own underſtanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy paths.* It is conſiderable who it is that gives this advice; the *wiſeſt of the ſons of men*; and yet he adviſeth *to truſt in God for direction, and not to lean to our own underſtandings.*

If therefore we be fully perſuaded of God's infinitely wiſe and good providence, we ought certainly to refer ourſelves to him, and perfectly to acquieſce in his diſpoſal, and to reſt ſatisfied in whatever he does; and whatever condition he aſſigns to us, we ought to be contented with it: if we be not, we find fault with his wiſdom, and reproach his goodneſs, and wiſh the government of the world in better hands.

So that a firm belief of the providence of God, as it would take away all anxiety concerning future events, ſo would it likewiſe ſilence all thoſe murmurings and diſcontents, which are apt to ariſe in us when things fall out croſs to our deſires, when diſaſters and diſappointments happen to us, and the providence of God caſts us into ſickneſs, or poverty, or diſgrace. This quieted David, when he was

ready

ready to break out into murmuring at the afflictions and calamities which befel him; *I held my peace,* (ſays he) *and ſpake not a word, becauſe thou, Lord, didſt it.* And this likewiſe ſhould keep us from fretting and vexing at inſtruments and ſecond cauſes; to conſider that the wiſe providence of God over-ruleth and diſpoſeth the actions of men, and that no harm can happen to us without his permiſſion. This conſideration reſtrained David's anger, under that high provocation of Shimei, when he followed him, reproaching him, and curſing him; *Let him alone; the Lord hath ſaid unto him, Curſe David.* He conſidered that God's providence permitted it; and looking upon it as coming from an higher hand, this calmed his paſſion, and made him bear it patiently. If a man be walking in the ſtreet, and one fling water upon him, it is apt to provoke him beyond all patience; but no man is in a paſſion for being wet ten times as much by rain from heaven. What calamity ſoever befalleth us, when we conſider it as coming from heaven, and ordered and permitted there, this will ſtill and huſh our paſſion, and make us, with Eli, to hold our peace, or only to ſay, *It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good.*

We are, indeed, liable to many things in this world, which have a great deal of evil and affliction in them, to poverty, and pain, and reproach, and reſtraint, and the loſs of our friends and near relations; and theſe are great afflictions, and very croſs and diſtaſtful unto us; and therefore, when we are in danger of any of theſe, and apprehend them to be making towards us, we are apt to be anxious, and full of trouble; and when they befal us, we are prone to cenſure the providence of God, and to judge raſhly concerning it, as if all things were not ordered by it for the beſt: But we ſhould conſider, that we are very ignorant and ſhort-ſighted creatures, and ſee but a little way before us, are not able to penetrate into the deſigns of God, and to look to the end of his providence.

We

We cannot (as Solomon expreſſeth it) *ſee the work of God from the beginning to the end*; whereas, if we ſaw the whole deſign of providence together, we ſhould ſtrangely admire the beauty and proportion of it, and ſhould ſee it to be very wiſe and good. And that which, upon the whole matter, and in the laſt iſſue and reſult of things, is moſt for our good, is certainly beſt, how grievous ſoever it may ſeem for the preſent. Sickneſs cauſed by phyſick, is, many times, more troubleſome for the preſent, than the diſeaſe we take it for; but every wiſe man compoſeth himſelf to bear it as well as he can, becauſe it is in order to his health: The evils and afflictions of this life, are the phyſick, and means of cure, which the providence of God is often neceſſitated to make uſe of; and if we did truſt ourſelves in the hands of this great phyſician, we ſhould quietly ſubmit to all the ſeverities of his providence, in confidence that they would *all work together for our good*.

When children are under the government of parents, or the diſcipline of their teachers, they are apt to murmur at them, and think it very hard to be denied ſo many things which they deſire, and to be conſtrained by ſeverities to a great many things which are grievous and tedious to them: but the parent and the maſter know very well, that it is their ignorance and inconſiderateneſs which makes them to think ſo, and that when they come to years, and to underſtand themſelves better, then they will acknowledge, that all that which gave them ſo much diſcontent, was really for their good, and that it was their childiſhneſs and folly, which made them to think otherwiſe, and that they had, in all probability, been undone, had they been indulged in their humour, and permitted in every thing to have their own will; they had not wit and conſideration enough to truſt the diſcretion of their parents and governors, and to believe that even thoſe things which were ſo diſpleaſing to them, would at laſt tend to their good.

There

There is a far greater diſtance between the wiſdom of God and men, and we are infinitely more ignorant and childiſh in reſpect of God, than our children are in reſpect of us; and being perſuaded of this, we ought to reckon, that while we are in this world, under God's care and diſcipline, it is neceſſary for our good, that we be reſtrained in many things which we eagerly deſire: and ſuffer many things that are grievous to us; and that when we come to heaven, and are grown up to be men, and *have put away childiſh thoughts*, and are come to underſtand things as they truly are, and not in *a riddle*, and darkneſs, as we now do; then the *judgment of God will break forth, as the light, and the righteouſneſs* of all his dealings *as the noon-day*; then all the riddles of providence will be clearly expounded to us, and we ſhall ſee a plain reaſon for all thoſe diſpenſations which we were ſo much ſtumbled at, and acknowledge the great wiſdom and goodneſs of them.

You ſee then what reaſon there is to refer ourſelves to the providence of God, and *to caſt all our care upon him*, to truſt him with the adminiſtration and diſpoſal of all our concernments, and firmly to believe, that if we love God, and be careful to pleaſe him, every thing in the iſſue will turn to the beſt for us; and therefore we ſhould not anxiouſly trouble ourſelves about the events of things, but reſign up ourſelves to the good pleaſure of him, who diſpoſeth all things *according to the counſel of his will*, entirely truſting in his goodneſs, and in his fatherly care of us, and affection to us; that he will order all things for us, for the beſt, referring the ſucceſs of all our concernments to him, *in whoſe hands are all the ways of the children of men*, chearfully ſubmitting to his determination, and the declarations of his providence, in every caſe.

And this is a proper expreſſion of our confidence in God's wiſdom and goodneſs, to refer things to him before the event, and to ſay with the Chriſtians, Acts xxi. 14. *The will of the Lord be done*: becauſe this ſhews that we are perſuaded that God will do bet-

better for us, than our own counsel and choice; and to submit to his will after the event, is likewise a great instance of our confidence in him, and that we believe that he hath done that which is best: For when God by his providence declares his will in any case, we should look upon it as the sentence of a wise and just judge, in which all parties concerned ought to acquiesce, and rest fully satisfied.

And this may well be expected from us Christians, who have much greater assurance of the particular providence of God, than the Heathen had; and yet some of them were able to free themselves from all trouble and anxiety, from murmuring and discontent. Upon this consideration Epictetus (as Arrian tells us) would express himself thus: *I had always rather have that which happens; because I esteem that better which God wills, than that which I should will.* And again, *Lift up thine eyes* (says he) *with confidence to God, and say, Henceforth, Lord, deal will me as thou pleasest,* ὁμογνωμονῶν σοὶ ἴσος εἰμὶ. *I am of the same opinion with thee, just of the same mind that thou art; I refuse nothing that seems good to thee; lead me where thou wilt; cloath me with what garments thou pleasest; set me in a publick place, or keep me in a private condition; continue me in mine own country, or banish me from it; bestow wealth upon me, or leave me to conflict and struggle with poverty, which of these thou pleasest,* ἐγὼ σοὶ ὑπὲρ ἁπάντων τούτων πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἀπολογήσομαι. *If men shall censure this providence towards me, and say, thou dealest hardly with me, I will apologize for thee, I will undertake and maintain thy cause, that what thou dost is best for me.* What could a Christian say more or better, by way of resignation of himself to the providence of God? It almost transports me to read such passages from a Heathen, especially if we consider in what condition Epictetus was; he had a maimed and deformed body, was in the extremity of poverty, a slave, and very cruelly and tyrannically used, so that we can hardly imagine a man in worse and more wretched circumstances; and yet he justifies

fies the providence of God in all this, and not only ſubmits to his condition, but is contented with it, and embraces it; and ſince God hath thought it fitteſt and beſt for him, he is of the ſame mind, and thinks ſo too. I confeſs, it doth not move me to hear Seneca, who flowed in wealth, and lived at eaſe, to talk magnificently, and to ſlight poverty and pain, as not worthy the name of evil and trouble: but to ſee this poor man, in the loweſt condition, and worſt circumſtances of humanity, bear up ſo bravely, and with ſuch a chearfulneſs and ſerenity of mind to entertain his hard fortune; and this not out of ſtupidity, but from a wiſe ſenſe of the providence of God, and a firm perſuaſion of the wiſdom and goodneſs of all his dealings, this, who can chooſe but be affected with it, as an admirable temper for a Chriſtian, much more for a Heathen! To which we may apply that ſaying of our Lord, concerning the heathen centurion, *Verily I ſay unto you, I have not found ſo great faith, no, not in Iſrael*; ſo wiſe, ſo equal, ſo firm a temper of mind is ſeldom to be found, *no, not among Chriſtians.* And this is the firſt conſideration, that if *God cares for us,* we and our concernments are in the beſt and ſafeſt hands, and therefore we ſhould *caſt all our care upon God.* The

Second is, Becauſe all our anxiety and care will do us no good: on the contrary, it will certainly do us hurt. We may fret and vex our own ſpirits, and make them reſtleſs, in the contemplation of the evils and diſappointments which we are afraid of, and may make our lives miſerable, in the ſad reflexions of our own thoughts; but we cannot, by all our anxiety and care, controul the courſe of things, and alter the deſigns of providence; we cannot, by all our vexation and trouble, over-rule events, and make things happen as we would have them. And this is the argument our Saviour uſeth to this very purpoſe, Matth. vi. 27. *Which of you by taking thought, can add one cubit to his ſtature?* So that all this trouble is unreaſonable, and to no purpoſe, becauſe it hath no influence on the event, either to promote or hinder it. Things are govern-

ed and diſpoſed by an higher hand, and placed out of our reach: we may deliberate, and contrive, and uſe our beſt endeavours for the effecting of our deſigns, but we cannot ſecure the event againſt a thouſand interpoſitions of divine providence, which we can neither foreſee nor hinder; but yet, notwithſtanding, theſe our endeavours are reaſonable, becauſe they are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the procuring of good, and prevention of evil; and though they may miſcarry, yet they are all we can do: But after this is done, trouble and anxiety about the event is the vaineſt thing in the world, becauſe it is to no purpoſe, nor doth at all conduce to what we deſire; *we diſquiet ourſelves in vain*, and we diſtruſt God's providence and care of us, and thereby provoke him to defeat and diſappoint us.

Let us then, by theſe conſiderations, be perſuaded to this duty, the practice whereof is of continual and univerſal uſe in the whole courſe of our lives; in all our affairs and concernments, after we have uſed our beſt endeavours, let us ſit down and be ſatisfied, and refer the reſt to God, whoſe providence governs the world, and takes care of all our intereſts, and of the intereſt of his church and religion, when they ſeem to be in greateſt danger.

We cannot but be convinced that this is very reaſonable, to leave the management of things to him who made them, and therefore underſtands beſt how to order them. The government of the world is a very curious and complicated thing, and not to be tampered with by every unskilful hand; and therefore, as an unskilful man, after he hath tampered a great while with a watch, thinking to bring it into better order, and is at laſt convinced that he can do no good upon it, carries it to him that made it, to mend it, and put it into order; ſo muſt we do, after all our care and anxiety about our own private concernments, or the publick ſtate of things; we muſt give over governing the world, as a buſineſs paſt our skill, as a province too hard, and *a knowledge too wonderful for us*, and leave it to him who

who made the world, to govern it, and take care of it.

And if we be not thus affected and diſpoſed, we do not believe the providence of God, whatever profeſſion we make of it: if we did, it would have an influence upon our minds, to free us from anxious care and diſcontent. Were we firmly perſuaded of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine providence, we ſhould confidently rely upon it, and, according to the Apoſtle's advice here in the text, *caſt all our care upon him, becauſe he careth for us.*

SERMON CXXXIX.

The wiſdom of God, in the redemption of mankind.

1 Cor. i. 24.

——*Chriſt, the power of God, and the wiſdom of God.*

I Have, in the ordinary courſe of my preaching, been treating of the attributes and perfections of God, more particularly thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, the knowledge and wiſdom of God. The firſt of theſe I have finiſhed; and made ſome progreſs in the ſecond, the wiſdom of God: which I have ſpoken to in general, and have propounded more particularly to conſider thoſe famous inſtances and arguments of the divine wiſdom, in the *creation* of the world; the *government* of it: and the *redemption of mankind by Jeſus Chriſt*. The firſt two of theſe I have ſpoken to, namely the *wiſdom* of God, which appears in the *creation* and *government* of the world. I come now to the

III. inſtance of the divine wiſdom, *the redemption of mankind by Jeſus Chriſt*; which I ſhall, by God's aſſiſtance, ſpeak to from theſe words, *Chriſt the wiſdom of God.*

The Apoſtle, in the beginning of this epiſtle, upon occaſion of his mentioning the diviſions and parties that were among the Corinthians, where one

ſaid, *I am of Paul*, another, *I am of Apollos*, asks them, whether *Paul was crucified for them?* or, whether *they were baptized in the name of Paul?* To convince them that they could not pretend this, that they were baptized into his name, he tells them, at the 14th and 15th verſes, that *he had not ſo much as baptized any of them, except two or three*; ſo far was he from having baptized them into his own name; and at the 17th verſe, he ſays, that his work, his principal work, was *to preach the goſpel*, which he had done, not with human eloquence, *not in wiſdom of words*, but with great plainneſs and ſimplicity, *leſt the croſs of Chriſt ſhould be made of none effect*; leſt, if he ſhould have uſed any artifice, the goſpel ſhould have been leſs powerful. And, indeed, his preaching was unaffectedly plain, and therefore the goſpel did ſeem to very many to be a fooliſh and ridiculous thing. The ſtory which they told of *Chriſt crucified*, was *to the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*. The Jews, who expected another kind of Meſſias, that ſhould come in great pomp and glory, to be a mighty temporal Prince, were angry at the ſtory of *a crucified Chriſt*. The Greeks, the Philoſophers, who expected ſome curious theories, adorned with eloquence, and delivered and laid down according to the exact rules of art, derided this plain and ſimple relation of Chriſt, and of the goſpel.

But though this deſign of the goſpel appeared ſilly and fooliſh to raſh and inconſiderate and prejudiced minds; yet *to them that are called*, to them that do believe, *both Jews and Gentiles, Chriſt the power of God, and the wiſdom of God*; *Chriſt*, that is, the way of our redemption by *Jeſus Chriſt*, which the Apoſtle preached, *the wiſdom of God*, an eminent inſtance of it.

So that the *redemption of man by Jeſus Chriſt*, is a deſign of admirable *wiſdom*. This I ſhall endeavour to confirm to you,

I. By general teſtimonies of ſcripture. And,

II. By a more particular enquiry into the nature of this deſign, and the means how it is accompliſhed.

1. By

1. By teſtimonies from ſcripture. You know I have all along, in my diſcourſes of the attributes of God, uſed this method of proving them, from the dictates of natural light, and the revelation of ſcripture: But now I muſt forſake my wonted method, for here the light of nature leaves me. The wiſdom of the creation is manifeſt in the things which are made; *the heavens declare the glory of God's* wiſdom, *and the firmament ſhews his handy-work.* The works of God do preach and ſet forth the wiſdom of the Creator; but the ſun, moon and ſtars do not preach the *goſpel.* The wiſdom of redemption is *wiſdom in a myſtery, hidden wiſdom, which none of the Princes* or Philoſophers *of this world knew.* The ſharpeſt wits, and the higheſt and moſt raiſed underſtandings amongſt the Heathen could ſay nothing of this. Here *the wiſdom of the wiſe,* and *the underſtanding of the prudent* is poſed, and we may make the Apoſtle's challenge, ver. 20. of this chapter, *Where is the wiſe? where is the diſputer of this world?* There is no natural light diſcovers Chriſt; the *wiſe men* cannot find him out, unleſs a ſtar be created on purpoſe to lead and direct to him. Therefore in this I ſhall only depend upon divine revelation, 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8. the goſpel is called *the wiſdom of God in a myſtery, even the hidden wiſdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew:* Eph. i. 7, 8. *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveneſs of ſins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wiſdom and prudence.* Eph. iii. 10, 11. *The manifold wiſdom of God, according to the eternal purpoſe which he purpoſed in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord.* This work of our redemption by Jeſus Chriſt, is ſo various and admirable, that it is not below the Angels to know and underſtand it; *To the intent, that unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known the manifold wiſdom of God.*

2. By enquiring more particularly into the nature of this deſign, and the means how it is accompliſhed. This is wiſdom, to fit means to ends; and the more difficult the end, the greater wiſdom is required to

find out ſuitable and ſufficient means for the accompliſhment of the end. Now the *wiſdom of redemption* will appear, if we conſider the caſe of fallen man; and what fit, and proper, and ſuitable means the wiſdom of God hath deviſed for our recovery.

Firſt, Let us conſider the caſe of fallen man, which was very ſad, both in reſpect of the miſery, and the difficulty of it.

1. In reſpect of the miſery of it. Man, who was made holy and upright by God, having by his voluntary tranſgreſſion, and wilful diſobedience, fallen from him, did preſently ſink into a corrupt and degenerate, into a miſerable and curſed condition, of which heaven and earth, and his own conſcience, bore him witneſs. Man being become a ſinner, is not only deprived of the image of God, but is liable to his juſtice: here was his miſery.

2. The difficulty of the caſe was this; man could not recover himſelf, and raiſe himſelf out of his own ruin; no creature was able to do it; ſo that our help is only in God; and, indeed, he is a merciful God, and doth not deſire our ruin, nor delight in our deſtruction: But ſuppoſe his mercy never ſo willing to ſave us, will not his holineſs, and juſtice, and truth check thoſe forward inclinations of his goodneſs, and hinder all the deſigns of his mercy? Is not ſin contrary to the holy nature of God? Hath not he declared his infinite hatred of it? Hath not he threatened it with heavy and dreadful puniſhment? and ſaid, that *the ſinner ſhall dy*, that *he will not acquit the guilty*, nor *let ſin go unpuniſhed*? Should he now, without any ſatisfaction to his offended juſtice, pardon the ſinner, remit his puniſhment, and receive him to favour; would this be agreeable to his holineſs, and juſtice, and truth? Would this become the wiſe governor of the world, who loves righteouſneſs and order; who hates ſin, and is obliged, by the eſſential rectitude of his nature, to diſcountenance ſin?

So that here is a conflict of the attributes and perfections of God. The mercy of God pities our miſery, and would recover us, would open paradiſe to us: but there is a flaming ſword that keeps us out; the

the incenſed juſtice of God, that muſt be ſatisfied; and if he takes vengeance of us, we are eternally ruined; if he ſpares us, how ſhall *mercy and juſtice meet together?* how ſhall God at once expreſs his love to the ſinner, and his hatred to ſin? here is the difficulty of our caſe.

II. Let us now enquire what means the wiſdom of God uſeth for our recovery. The wiſdom of God hath deviſed this expedient to accommodate all theſe difficulties, to reconcile the mercy and juſtice of God. The Son of God ſhall undertake this work, and ſatisfy the offended juſtice of God, and repair the ruined nature of man. He ſhall bring God and man together, make up this gulf, and renew the commerce and correſpondence between God and us, which was broken off by ſin. The work that God deſigns, is the redemption of man, that is, his recovery from a ſtate of ſin and eternal death, to a ſtate of holineſs and eternal life. The Son of God is to engage in this deſign of our redemption, to ſatisfy the offended juſtice of God towards us, ſo as to purchaſe our deliverance from the wrath to come, and ſo as to reſtore us to the image and favour of God, that we may be ſanctified, and be made heirs of eternal life.

For opening of this we will conſider,

1. The fitneſs of the perſon deſigned for this work.

2. The fitneſs of the means whereby he was to accompliſh it.

1. The fitneſs of the perſon deſigned for this work, and that was the *eternal Son of God*; who, in reſpect of his infinite wiſdom and power, the dignity and credit of his perſon, his dearneſs to his Father, and intereſt in him, was very fit to undertake this work, to mediate a reconciliation between God and man.

2. The fitneſs of the means whereby he was to accompliſh it; and theſe I ſhall refer to two heads, his *humiliation* and *exaltation*. All the parts of theſe are very ſubſervient to the deſign of our redemption.

I. The

I. The *humiliation* of Chriſt, which conſiſts of three principal parts; his *incarnation*, his *life*, and his *death*.

1. His incarnation, which is ſet forth in ſcripture by ſeveral expreſſions; his being *made fleſh, and dwelling among us*, John i. 14. His being *made of the ſeed of David according to the fleſh*, Rom. i. 3. His being *made of a woman*, Gal. iv. 4. *The manifeſtation of God in the fleſh*, 1. Tim. iii. 16. His *taking part of fleſh and blood*, Heb. ii. 14. His *taking on him the ſeed of Abraham*, and *being made like unto his brethren*, Heb. ii. 16, 17. His *coming in the fleſh*, 1 John ii. 2. All which ſignifies his taking upon him human nature, and being really a man as well as God. The eternal Son of God, in the fulneſs of time, took our nature; that is, aſſumed a real ſoul and body into union with the divine nature. Now this perſon, who was really both God and man, was admirably fitted for the work of our redemption.

In general, this made him a fit mediator, an equal and middle perſon to interpoſe in this difference, and take up this quarrel between God and man. Being both God and man, he was concerned for both parties, and intereſted both in the honour of God, and the happineſs of man, and engaged to be tender of both; and to procure the one, by ſuch ways as might be conſiſtent with the other.

More particularly his incarnation did fit him for thoſe two offices which he was to perform in his humiliation, of Prophet and Prieſt.

1. The office of Prophet, to teach us both by his doctrine, and his life.

By his doctrine. His being in the likeneſs of man; this made him more familiar to us. He was *a Prophet raiſed up from among his brethren*, as Moſes ſpake, and he makes this an argument why we ſhould hear him. Should God ſpeak to us immediately by himſelf, we *could not hear him and live*. God condeſcends to us, and complies with the weakneſs of our nature, and *raiſeth up a Prophet from among our brethren*; we ſhould *hear him*. And then his being God, did add credit and authority to what

what he ſpake; he could confirm the doctrine which he taught by miracles. Of his teaching us by his life, I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak preſently.

2. For the office of Prieſt. He was fit to be our Prieſt, becauſe *he was taken from among men,* as the Apoſtle ſpeaks; fit to ſuffer, as being man, having a *body prepared,* as it is, Heb. x. 5. and fit to ſatisfy, by his ſufferings for the ſins of all men, as being God, which put an infinite dignity and value upon them; the ſufferings of an infinite perſon, being equal to the offences done againſt an infinite God: And thus the mercy of God is exalted without the diminution of his juſtice.

And as his incarnation did qualify him for ſuffering, ſo for compaſſion, and fellow-ſuffering with us, Heb. ii. 17, 18. *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High-prieſt, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the ſins of the people; for in that he himſelf hath ſuffered, being tempted, he is able to ſuccour them that are tempted.*

2. His life was a means admirably fitted to bring men to holineſs and goodneſs. I might go through all the parts of it; but becauſe I intend to be very ſhort upon theſe heads, I ſhall only take notice of that part of his life, which was ſpent in his publick miniſtry: *he went about doing good*; the doctrine that he preached was calculated for the deſtroying of ſin, and the promoting of holineſs; the great end and deſign of it was to advance righteouſneſs, and goodneſs, and humility, and patience, and ſelf-denial; to make us mortify our ſenſual deſires, and brutiſh paſſions, to contemn and renounce this preſent world; and this being the deſign of it, it was a moſt proper engine to demoliſh the works of the Devil. And to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine, the whole frame of his life, and all the circumſtances of it, did contribute. His life was the practice of his doctrine, and a clear comment upon it. The meanneſs of his condition in the world, that he had no ſhare of the poſſeſſions of it, was a great ad-

advantage to his doctrine of ſelf-denial, and contempt of the world. *The captain of our ſalvation,* that he might draw off our affections from the world, and ſhew us how little the things of it are to be valued, would himſelf have no ſhare in it: Matth. viii. 20. *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have neſts, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.* The mean circumſtances of his condition were very eminently for the advantage of his deſign; for had he not been ſtripped of all worldly accommodations, he could not have been ſo free from ſuſpicion of a worldly intereſt and deſign; nay, he could not have been ſo conſiderable; he was really greater for his meanneſs. The very Heathen did account this true greatneſs, (as we find in Ariſtotle) not to admire the pleaſures, and greatneſs, and pomp of the world. And that his meanneſs might be no diſadvantage to him, thoſe evidences that he gave of his divinity in the wonderful things that he did, rendered him conſiderable, and gained more reverence and authority to his doctrine, than his meanneſs could bring contempt upon it.

Beſides, the manner of his converſation was a very great advantage to him; he was of a very ſweet and converſable and obliging temper; and by this means he did gain upon the people, and was acceptable to them; and thus he did apply himſelf to them in the moſt human ways, to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine. The miracles that he wrought, did confirm his doctrine beyond all exception, as being a divine teſtimony, and ſetting a ſeal of God to the truth of it; yet becauſe many were blinded with prejudice, and though they *did ſee,* yet *would not ſee,* Chriſt, *the wiſdom of God,* did ſo order the buſineſs of his miracles, as to make them human ways of winning upon them, for they were generally ſuch as were beneficial; *he healed all manner of diſeaſes* and *maladies* by this miraculous power; and ſo his miracles did not only tend to confirm his doctrine, as they were miracles, but to make way for entertainment of it, as they were benefits; this was a ſenſible demonſtration to them, that he intend-

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ed them good, becauſe he did them good; they would eaſily believe, that he, who healed their bodies, would not harm their ſouls. This for his life.

III. His death, which was the loweſt ſtep of his humiliation, and the conſummation of his ſufferings. Now the death of Chriſt did eminently contribute to this deſign of our redemption. The death of Chriſt did not only expiate the guilt of ſin, and pacify conſcience, by making plenary ſatisfaction to the divine juſtice; but did eminently contribute to the killing of ſin in us: Rom. vi. 6. *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of ſin might be deſtroyed, that henceforth we might not ſerve ſin.* Rom. viii. 3. *God ſending his own Son in the likeneſs of ſinful fleſh, and for ſin* (that is, by being a ſacrifice for ſin) *condemned ſin in the fleſh.* The death of Chriſt convinceth ſin to be a great evil; and doth condemn it, becauſe the impartial juſtice of God did ſo ſeverely puniſh it in his own Son, when he appeared in the perſon of a ſinner; and this is the moſt powerful argument to us to crucify ſin, that it crucified our Saviour. That ſo innocent and holy a perſon ſhould ſuffer ſo cruel and ignominious a death for our ſins, ſhould ſet us for ever againſt it, and make us hate it with a perfect hatred.

The circumſtances of Chriſt's ſufferings are with admirable wiſdom fitted for the conquering of ſin and ſatan. Sin came by the woman: The *ſeed of the woman* ſuffers for ſin; and by ſuffering, conquers it. Sin began in the garden; and there our Saviour began his ſufferings for ſin. Sin came by the tree; and Chriſt bears the curſe of it in *hanging upon the tree*, and crucifies it by his croſs.

And as he conquered ſin, ſo he overcame ſatan by his own arts. The Devil found Chriſt in the likeneſs of a man, he judged him mortal, and his great deſign was to procure his death, and get him into his grave. Chriſt permits him to bring about his deſign; he lets him enter into Judas; he lets the Jews crucify, and put him into his grave, and roll a great ſtone upon it: But here his divine wiſdom appears,

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in ruining the Devil by his own deſign, *and ſnaring him in the works of his own hands*, Heb. ii. 14. *By death he deſtroys him that had the power of death; that is, the Devil.*

I know the ſufferings of Chriſt were, by the *wiſe of the world*, made the great objection againſt the wiſdom of this diſpenſation; the *croſs of Chriſt was to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*; and yet the wiſeſt of them had determined otherwiſe in general, though not in this particular caſe. Plato (in the ſecond book of his *Commonwealth*) ſaith, "That if a man may be "a perfect pattern of juſtice and righteouſneſs, and "be approved by God and men, he muſt be ſtrip-"ped of all the things of this world; he muſt be "poor and diſgraced, and be accounted a wicked "and unjuſt man; he muſt be whipped, and tor-"mented, and crucified as a malefactor;" which is, as it were, a prophetical deſcription of our Saviour's ſufferings. And Arrian, in his Epict. deſcribing a man fit to reform the world, whom he calls the apoſtle, the meſſenger, the preacher, and miniſter of God, ſaith, "He muſt be without houſe and har-"bour, and worldly accommodations; muſt be "armed with ſuch patience for the greateſt ſuffer-"ings, as if he were a ſtone, and devoid of ſenſe; "he muſt be a ſpectacle of miſery, and contempt "to the world." So that, by the acknowledgment of theſe two wiſe heathens, there was nothing in the ſufferings of Chriſt that was unbecoming the wiſdom of God, and improper to the end and deſign of Chriſt's coming into the world; beſides, that they ſerved a further end, which they did not dream of, *the ſatisfying of divine juſtice.*

Secondly, His exaltation. The ſeveral parts of which, his reſurrection, and aſcenſion, and *ſitting at the right hand of God*, were eminently ſubſervient to the perfecting and carrying on of this deſign.

The reſurrection of Chriſt is the great confirmation of the truth of all that he delivered, Rom. i. 4. *declared to be the Son of God with power,* ὁρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει; *by the reſurrection from the dead.* This great miracle of his reſurrection from the dead,

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did determine the controverſy, and put it out of all doubt and queſtion, that he was the *Son of God.* And then his aſcenſion, and *ſitting at the right hand of God,* this gives us the aſſurance of a bleſſed immortality, and is a demonſtration of a life to come, and a pledge of everlaſting glory and happineſs. And can any thing tend more to the encouragement of obedience, and to make us dead to the pleaſures and enjoyments of this life, than the aſſurance of eternal life and happineſs?

And then the conſequents of his exaltation, they do eminently conduce to our recovery. The ſending of the Holy Ghoſt *to lead us into all truth,* to ſanctify us, to aſſiſt us, and to comfort us under the greateſt troubles and afflictions; and the powerful interceſſion of Chriſt in our behalf, and his return to judgment; the expectation whereof, is the great argument to repentance, and holineſs of life: Acts xvii. 30, 31. *And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every-where to repent: Becauſe he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead.* And thus I have endeavoured to prove, that the redemption of man by Jeſus Chriſt, is a deſign of admirable wiſdom.

The uſe I ſhall make of it, is to convince us of the unreaſonableneſs of unbelief, and the folly and madneſs of impenitency.

Firſt, The unreaſonableneſs of unbelief. The goſpel reveals to us the wiſe counſel and diſpenſation of God for our redemption; and thoſe who disbelieve the goſpel, *they reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves,* as it is ſaid of the unbelieving Phariſees and Lawyers, Luke vii. 30. The goſpel reveals to us a deſign ſo reaſonable and full of wiſdom, that they who can disbelieve it are deſperate perſons, devoted to ruin. 1 Cor. i. 18. *The croſs of Chriſt is to them that periſh, fooliſhneſs.* 2 Cor. iv 3. 4. *But if our goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, leſt the light of the glorious go-*

ſpel of Chriſt, who is the image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them. The goſpel carries ſo much light and evidence in it, that it cannot be hid from any but ſuch whoſe eyes are blinded by the Devil and their luſts.

He that will duly weigh and conſider things, and look narrowly into this wiſe diſpenſation of God, ſhall find nothing to object againſt it; nay, ſhall diſcover in it the greateſt motives and inducements to believe. We are apt to believe any thing that is reaſonable, eſpecially if it be for our advantage. Now this wiſe diſpenſation of God is not only reaſonable in itſelf, but beneficial to us; it does at once highly gratify our underſtandings, and ſatisfy our intereſt; why ſhould we not then believe and entertain it?

I. The deſign of the goſpel is reaſonable, and gratifies our underſtandings. And in this reſpect, the goſpel hath incomparable advantages above any other religion. The end of all religion is to advance piety and holineſs, and real goodneſs among men; and the more any religion advanceth theſe, the more reaſonable it is. Now the great incitements and arguments to piety, are the excellency and perfection of the divine nature; fear of puniſhment, and hopes of pardon and reward. Now the goſpel repreſents all theſe to the greateſt advantage.

1. It repreſents the perfections of God to the greateſt advantage, eſpecially thoſe which tend moſt to the promotion of piety, and the love of God in us; his juſtice and mercy.

(1.) His juſtice. The goſpel repreſents it inflexible in its rights, and inexorable, and that will not in any caſe let ſin go unpuniſhed. The impartiality of the divine juſtice appears in this diſpenſation, that when God pardons the ſinner, yet he will puniſh ſin ſo ſeverely in his own Son, who was the ſurety. Now, what could more tend to diſcountenance ſin, and convince us of the great evil of it?

(2.) His mercy. This diſpenſation is a great demonſtration of the mercy, and goodneſs, and love of God, in ſending his Son to dy for ſinners, and

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in ſaving us by devoting and ſacrificing him, John iii. 16. *For God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.* Rom. v. 8. *But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet ſinners, Chriſt died for us.* 1 John iv. 9, 10. *In this was manifeſted the love of God towards us, becauſe God ſent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and ſent his Son to be the propitiation for our ſins.* Now this repreſentation of God's mercy and love, which the goſpel makes, is of great force and efficacy to melt our hearts into love to God.

2. The ſecond argument to piety, is fear of puniſhment. The goſpel hath revealed to us the miſery of thoſe who continue in their ſin; it hath made clear and terrible diſcoveries of thoſe torments which attend ſinners in another world, and hath opened to us the treaſures of God's wrath; ſo that now under the goſpel, *hell is naked before us, and deſtruction hath no covering*; and this is one thing which makes the goſpel ſo powerful an engine to deſtroy ſin, Rom. i. 16, 18. *The goſpel is the power of God unto ſalvation; for therein is the wrath of God revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men.*

3. Hopes of pardon and reward. And this, added to the former, renders the goſpel the moſt powerful inſtrument to take men off from ſin, and engage them to holineſs that can be imagined. The means to draw men from ſin, when they are once awakened with the fear of vengeance, is hopes of pardon and mercy, and the way to encourage obedience for the future, is hope of reward. Now, as an argument to us to retreat and draw back from ſin, the goſpel promiſes pardon and indemnity to us; and as an incitement to holineſs, the goſpel opens heaven to us, and ſets before us everlaſting glory and happineſs, and gives us the greateſt aſſurance of it.

This is the firſt, the deſign of the goſpel is reaſonable, in that it does eminently and directly ſerve the ends of piety and religion.

II. This diſpenſation of God is beneficial to us, and

ſatisfies our intereſt; and this adds to the unreaſonableneſs of our unbelief, this deſign of God being not only reaſonable in itſelf, but deſirable to us, that it ſhould be ſo; becauſe of the eminent advantages that redound to us by it. The deſign of the goſpel is to deliver us from the guilt and dominion of ſin, and the tyranny of ſatan; to reſtore us to the image and favour of God; and, by making us partakers of a divine nature, to bring us to eternal life. And is there any thing of real advantage which is not comprehended in this? Is it not deſirable to every man, that there ſhould be a way whereby our guilty conſciences may be quieted and appeaſed; whereby we may be delivered from the fear of death and hell? Is it not deſirable to be freed from the ſlavery of our luſts, and reſcued from the tyranny and power of the great deſtroyer of ſouls? Is it not deſirable to be like God, and to be aſſured of his love and favour, who is the beſt friend and the moſt dangerous enemy; and to be ſecured, that when we leave this world, we ſhall be unſpeakably happy for ever? Now the goſpel conveys theſe benefits to us; and if this be the caſe of the goſpel, and there be nothing in this deſign of our redemption, but what is wiſe, and reaſonable, and exceedingly for our benefit and advantage; why ſhould any man be ſo averſe to the belief of it? Why ſhould unbelief be counted a piece of wit? Is it wit to ſet ourſelves againſt reaſon, and to oppoſe our beſt intereſt? It is wickedneſs, and prejudice, and inconſiderateneſs, which disbelieves the goſpel. Thoſe who do conſider things, welcome this good news, and embrace theſe glad tidings. *Wiſdom is juſtified of her children.* To them who are truly ſenſible of their own intereſt, and willing to accept of reaſonable evidence, this is not only *a true ſaying*, but *worthy of all acceptation*; *that Chriſt came into the world to ſave ſinners.*

Secondly, This doth convince men of the madneſs and folly of impenitency. Now ſince the wiſdom of God hath contrived ſuch a way for our recovery, and by the declaration of God's wrath, and diſpleaſure againſt ſin, hath given us ſuch arguments to repentance,

pentance, and by discovering a way of pardon and mercy, hath given us such encouragement to repentance, how great must the folly of impenitency be? For consider,

1. That impenitency directly sets itself against the *wisdom of God.* If after all this we continue in our sins, *we reject the counsel of God against ourselves,* we despise the wisdom of God, and charge that *with folly:* and we do it against ourselves, to our own injury and ruin. If we live in our sins, and cherish our lusts, we directly oppose the end of our redemption, we contradict the great design of the gospel, we contemn the admirable contrivance of God's wisdom, who sent his Son into the world on purpose to destroy sin; for we uphold that which he came to destroy, 1 John iii. 5. *Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins.* Now shall we continue in sin, when we know *the Son of God was manifested to take away sin?* God cannot but take it very ill at our hands, when he hath laid out *the riches of his wisdom* in this design, for us to go about to defeat him in it; this is at once to be unthankful to God, and injurious to ourselves: It is such a madness, as if a condemned man should despise a pardon; as if a prisoner should be fond of his fetters, and refuse deliverance; as if a man desperately sick should fight with his Physician, and put away health from him. If we do not comply with the *wisdom of God,* which hath contrived our recovery, *we forsake our own mercy, and neglect a great salvation; we love death, and hate our own souls,* Prov. viii. 14, 15, 16.

2. Consider, we cannot expect the *wisdom of God* should do more for our recovery, than hath been already done; *the wisdom of God* will not try any further means. Matth. xxi. 37. *Last of all he sent his Son.* If we despise this way, if we *tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, whereby we are sanctified, an unholy thing, there will remain no more sacrifice for sin,* Heb. x. 26. 29. What can expiate the guilt of sin, if the blood of Christ do not? What shall take us off from sin, what shall sanctify us, if *the blood of the cove-*

nant be ineffectual? We reſiſt our laſt remedy, and make void the beſt means the wiſdom of God could deviſe for our recovery, if, after the revelation of the goſpel, we continue in our ſins.

3. If we fruſtrate this deſign of God's wiſdom for our recovery, our ruin will be the more dreadful and certain. Impenitency under the goſpel will increaſe our miſery. *If Chriſt had not come, we had had no ſin*, in compariſon of what we now have; *but now our ſin remains, and there is no cloak for our ſin*, προφασιν ουκ εχουσιν. We ſhall not be able at the day of judgment to preface any thing by way of excuſe, or apology for our impenitency. What ſhall we be able to ſay to the juſtice of God, when that ſhall condemn us, who rejected his wiſdom, which would have ſaved us? We would all be ſaved, but we would be ſaved without repentance; now the wiſdom of God hath not found out any other way to ſave us from hell, but by ſaving us from our ſins. And thou that wilt not ſubmit to this method of divine wiſdom, take thy courſe, and let us ſee *how thou wilt eſcape the damnation of hell.* I will conclude all with thoſe dreadful words which the wiſdom of God pronounceth againſt thoſe that deſpiſe her, and refuſe to hearken to her voice, Prov. i. 24, 25, 26. *Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed, I have ſtretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have ſet at naught my counſel, and would none of my reproof: I alſo will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.* They who will not comply with the counſel of God for their happineſs, they ſhall inherit the condition which they have choſen to themſelves: *they ſhall eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.*

SER.

SERMON CXL.

The juſtice of God in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.

GEN. xviii. 25.
Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

IN treating of the attributes of God, I have conſidered thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, *viz.* knowledge and wiſdom; I come now to conſider thoſe which relate to the divine will, *viz.* theſe four, the juſtice, the truth, the goodneſs, and the holineſs of God. I begin with the *firſt*, namely, the juſtice of God.

At the 17th verſe of this chapter, God, by a great and wonderful condeſcenſion of his goodneſs, reveals to Abraham his intention concerning the deſtruction of Sodom: Upon this Abraham, ver. 23. interceded with God for ſaving the righteous perſons that were there; and to this end he pleads with God his juſtice and righteouſneſs, with which he apprehended it to be inconſiſtent *to deſtroy the righteous with the wicked*, which, without a miracle, could not be avoided in a general deſtruction. *Wilt thou alſo deſtroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou alſo deſtroy, and not ſpare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? that be far from thee to do after this manner, to ſlay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous ſhould be as the wicked, that be far from thee; ſhall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* This negative interrogation is equivalent to a vehement affirmation, *ſhall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* that is, *undoubtedly he will.* This we may take for a certain and undoubted principle, that *in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments*,

niſhments, the Judge of the world will do righteouſly.

So that the argument that lies under our conſideration, is the *juſtice of God in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments:* For the clearing of which, we will conſider it,

Firſt, In *hypotheſi,* in regard to the particular caſe which is here put by Abraham in the text.

Secondly, In *theſi,* we will conſider it in general, in *the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.*

Firſt, We will conſider it in *hypotheſi,* in regard to the particular caſe which is here put by Abraham in the text; and the rather, becauſe if we look well into it, there is ſomething of real difficulty in it, not eaſy to be cleared; for Abraham's reaſoning, if it be true, does plainly conclude, that it would have been unrighteous with God in the deſtruction of Sodom, not to make a difference between the righteous and the wicked, but to involve them equally in the ſame common deſtruction. *That be far from thee to do after this manner, to ſlay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous ſhould be as the wicked, that be far from the; ſhall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* as if he had ſaid, *Surely the Judge of all the earth will never do ſo unrighteous a thing.*

And yet notwithſtanding this, we ſee it is very uſual for the providence of God to involve good men in general calamities, and to make no viſible difference between the righteous and the wicked. Now the difficulty is, how to reconcile theſe appearances of providence with this reaſoning of Abraham in the text.

And for doing of this, I ſee but one poſſible way, and that is this, that Abraham does not here ſpeak concerning the judgments of God which befal men in the ordinary courſe of his providence, which many times happen promiſcuouſly, and involve good and bad men in the ſame ruin; and the reaſon hereof is plain, becauſe God in his ordinary providence does permit the cauſes, which produce theſe judgments, to act according to their own nature,

ture, and they either cannot or will not make any distinction: for the calamities which ordinarily happen in the world, are produced by two sorts of causes, either those which we call *natural*, or those which are *voluntary*. *Natural* causes, such as wind and thunder, and storms, and the infection of the air, and the like; these acting by a necessity of nature, without any knowledge or choice, can make no distinction between the good and bad. And the *voluntary* causes of calamities, as men are, they many times will make no difference between the righteous and the wicked; nay, many times they are maliciously bent against the righteous, and the effects of their malice fall heaviest upon them. Now we say that things happen in the way of ordinary providence, when natural causes are permitted to act according to their nature, and voluntary causes are left to their liberty; and therefore, in the course of ordinary providence, it is not to be expected that such a distinction should be made; it is neither possible, nor does justice require it; it is not possible, supposing natural causes left to act according to their nature, and voluntary causes to be left to their liberty; nor does justice require it; for every man is so much a sinner, that no evil that befalls him in this world, can be said to be unjust in respect of God.

So that Abraham is not here to be understood, as speaking of such judgments as befal men in the ordinary course of God's providence, in which, if the good and bad be involved alike, it cannot be expected to be otherwise, nor is there any injustice in it; but Abraham here speaks of miraculous and extraordinary judgments, which are immediately inflicted by God for the punishment of some crying sins, and the example of the world, to deter others from the like. And such was this judgment, which God intended to bring upon Sodom, and which Abraham hath relation to in this discourse of his. In this case it may be expected from the justice of God, that a difference should be made between the

the righteous and the wicked; and that for theſe reaſons:

1. Becauſe this is a judgment which God himſelf executes. It is not an event of common providence, which always follows the nature of its cauſe, but an act of God, as a judge. Now it is eſſential to a judge to make a diſcrimination between the good and the bad, ſo as to puniſh the one and to ſpare the other; and this is as neceſſary to all proper acts of judgment in this world, as the other; there being no other difference between them, but that one is a particular judgment, and the other the general judgment of the whole world.

2. When God goes out of the way of his ordinary providence in puniſhing, it may reaſonably be expected that he ſhould make a difference between the good and the bad; for the reaſon why he does not in his common providence, is becauſe he will not break and interrupt the eſtabliſhed order of things upon every little occaſion: But when he does go beſide the common courſe of things in puniſhing, the reaſon ceaſeth, which hindred him before from making a difference; and it is reaſonable enough to expect, that in the inflicting of a miraculous judgment, a miraculous difference ſhould be made. Without making this difference, the end of theſe miraculous judgments would not be attained, which is, remarkably to puniſh the crying ſins of men, and by that example to deter others from the like ſins: But if theſe judgments ſhould fall promiſcuouſly upon the righteous and the wicked, it would not be evident, that they were deſigned for the puniſhment of ſuch ſins, when men did ſee that they fell likewiſe upon thoſe who were not guilty of thoſe ſins, and conſequently the example could not be ſo effectual to deter men from ſin.

Upon all theſe accounts you ſee that Abraham's reaſoning was very ſtrong and well grounded, as to thoſe judgments which are miraculous and extraordinary, and immediately inflicted by God, for the puniſhment of great and heinous ſins, which was the caſe he was ſpeaking of. And accordingly we find

find, that in thoſe judgments which have been immediately and miraculouſly inflicted by God, he hath always made this difference between the righteous and the wicked. In the deluge which he brought upon the old world, the Spirit of God gives this reaſon why the judgment was ſo univerſal, becauſe *all fleſh had corrupted his way upon the earth*; and the reaſon why he ſaved Noah and his family was, becauſe in this general corruption of mankind, he alone was righteous; *Thee have I ſeen righteous before me in this generation.* So likewiſe in that miraculous judgment of Korah and his company, when *God made a new thing, and the earth opened her mouth to ſwallow them up,* none periſhed but he and his complices; the reſt had warning given them by God to *remove from the tents of thoſe wicked men.* Thus you ſee that as to the particular caſe in the text, Abraham's reaſoning concerning the juſtice of God is very firm and concluding. I proceed to the

Second thing, which was that which I principally intended to diſcourſe upon, *viz.* to conſider the *juſtice of God in general, in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.* And here I cannot but grant, that the beſt evidence of this is yet wanting. We have clear demonſtrations of the power and wiſdom, and goodneſs of God, in this vaſt and admirable frame of things which we ſee; but we muſt ſtay till the day of judgment for a clear and full manifeſtation of the divine juſtice; for which reaſon the day of judgment is in ſcripture called, *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* But in the mean time we may receive ſufficient aſſurance of this, both from natural reaſon, and from divine revelation.

1. From natural reaſon, which tells us, that God *loves righteouſneſs* and *hates iniquity*, and conſequently that it muſt be agreeable to his nature, to countenance and encourage the one, and to diſcountenance the other; that is, to give ſome publick teſtimony of his liking and affection to the one, and of his hatred and diſlike of the other; which cannot

not otherwiſe be done, but by rewards and puniſhments.

But however the Heathen reaſoned about this matter, whatever premiſſes they laid, they firmly believed the concluſion, that *God is juſt.* Plato lays down this as a certain and undoubted principle, "That God is in no wiſe unjuſt, but as righteous "as is poſſible; and that we cannot reſemble God "more, than in this quality and diſpoſition. So likewiſe Seneca tells, us, "That the Gods are neither capable of receiving an injury, nor of doing any thing that is unjuſt." Antoninus the great Emperor and Philoſopher, ſpeaking doubtfully, whether good men are extinguiſhed by death, or remain afterwards; "If it be juſt, ſays he, you may "be ſure it is ſo; if it be not juſt, you may certainly conclude the contrary; for God is juſt, and "being ſo, he will do nothing that is unjuſt or unreaſonable." And indeed the heathen Philoſophers looked upon this as the great ſanction of all moral precepts, that God was the witneſs and the avenger of the breach and violation of them, *Qui ſecus faxit, deus ipſe vindex erit; if any man do contrary to them, God himſelf will puniſh it;* which ſhews, that there is a natural awe upon the minds of men of the divine juſtice, which will overtake offenders either in this world or the other. But this will more clearly appear in the

2d Place, from ſcripture, or divine revelation. And thoſe texts which I ſhall produce to this purpoſe, may be reduced to theſe two heads; either ſuch as prove the *rectitude of the divine nature,* and his juſtice in general; or ſuch as ſpeak more particularly of the juſtice and equity of his providence *in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.* I begin, *firſt,* with thoſe which declare the *rectitude of the divine nature,* and the juſtice of God in general, and that either by attributing this perfection to him, or by removing the contrary, injuſtice and unrighteouſneſs, at the greateſt diſtance from him.

1. Thoſe which attribute this perfection to God. I ſhall mention but a few of many, Pſal. cxxix. 4.

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The Lord is righteous. Dan. ix. 7. *O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee.* This good men have acknowledged, when they have lain under the hand of God, Ezra ix. 15. *O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous.* And this the worst of men have been forced to own, when they have been in extremity, Exod. ix. 27. then *Pharaoh said, The Lord is righteous.* This hath been likewise acknowledged by those who have lain under the greatest temptation to doubt of it, Jer. xii. 1. *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet, let me talk with thee of thy judgments; wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?* The prophet, notwithstanding he saw the prosperous condition of wicked men, and the afflicted state of the godly, which seemed hard to be reconciled with the justice of God's providence: yet, before he would so much as reason about it, he lays down this as a certain conclusion, *Righteous art thou, O Lord.* To this head likewise belong all those texts which speak of *righteousness*, as *God's dwelling-place*, and *his throne*, of his *delight in justice* and of the *duration* and *eternity* of it, which I need not particularly recite.

2. There are likewise other texts, which remove the contrary, *viz. injustice* and *unrighteousness* at the greatest distance from God, as being most contrary to his nature and perfection. Deut. xxxii. 4. *A God of truth, and without iniquity.* 2 Chron. xix. 7. *There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor accepting of persons, nor taking of gifts.* Job viii. 3. *Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?* which is a vehement negation of the thing. Job xxxiv. 10, 11, 12. *Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* Rom. ix. 14. *What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.*

Secondly, There are other texts which speak more particularly of the *justice and righteousness of God in*

the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments. It is true indeed, the juſtice of God doth not conſtantly appear in this world in the diſpenſations of his providence, becauſe this is a time of patience and forbearance to ſinners, and of trial and exerciſe to good men; but there is a day coming, when all things ſhall be ſet ſtraight, and every man ſhall receive the juſt reward of his deeds, when the juſtice of God ſhall be evident to all the world, and every eye ſhall ſee it, and ſhall acknowledge the righteous judgment of God; and this the ſcripture moſt clearly and expreſly declares unto us; and hence it is, that the day of judgment is called *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* The righteouſneſs of God doth not now ſo clearly appear, but that there are many clouds over it; but there ſhall be *a day of revelation,* when the righteouſneſs of God ſhall be made manifeſt to all the world.

The remunerative juſtice of God ſhall then appear in the rewarding the righteous; and the punitive juſtice of God in puniſhing the wicked and ungodly; *ſo that a man ſhall ſay, verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth the world.*

Now the righteouſneſs of this vengeance of God, which God will take upon ſinners, is further ſet forth to us in ſcripture, from the equity and impartiality of it.

I. from the equity of it.

1. In that the ſins of men have juſtly deſerved the puniſhment that ſhall come upon them, Rom. i. 32. *Who knoweth the judgment of God,* Δικαίωμα τοῦ Θεοῦ, *the righteous judgment of God, that they which commit ſuch things, are worthy of death.*

2. In that the judgment of God ſhall be proportioned to the degree and heinouſneſs of mens ſins, ſo as the leſſer or greater ſins ſhall be puniſhed with more or leſs ſeverity. So our Saviour threatens to thoſe who continue impenitent under the goſpel; and the advantages of it, their caſe ſhall be more ſad than that of Tyre and Sidon, and *it ſhall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgment,*

ment, than for them, Mat. xi. 20, 21. and Luke xii. 47, 48. There you have different degrees of puniſhment threatened, proportionably to the aggravations of the ſins which men have committed; *The ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes: but he that knew it not, but did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes*; and ſo proportionably of all other aggravations of ſins, *for to whom much is given, of him ſhall much be required*; *and unto whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* So likewiſe God will vindicate the contempt of the goſpel more ſeverely than of the law, becauſe the confirmation of it is clearer, and the ſalvation offered by it greater. Heb. ii. 2, 3, 4. *If the word ſpoken by Angels was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received a juſt recompence of reward, how ſhall we eſcape?* &c: And ſo, Heb. x. 28, 29. *He that deſpiſed Moſes his law, died without mercy under two or three witneſſes: of how much ſorer puniſhment, ſuppoſe ye, ſhall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?* &c.

II. The righteouſneſs of this judgment is further ſet forth to us in ſcripture by the impartiality of it. Hitherto belong all thoſe texts, which remove from God that προσωποληψία, that *reſpect of perſons*, which is ſo incident to human tribunals. Now *reſpect of perſons* is in diſtribution of juſtice, and hath regard to ſome external qualities or circumſtances of the perſons, which do not appertain to the merit of the cauſe, and upon account of thoſe circumſtances, to deal unequally with thoſe, whoſe caſe is equal; as when two perſons, who are equally guilty of a crime, are brought to their trial, and the one is condemned, and the other acquitted, upon the account of friendſhip, or relation, or ſome other intereſt, becauſe one is poor, and the other rich; the one hath powerful friends to intercede for him, the other not; the one brings a gift or bribe, the other not; or upon any other account, beſides the pure merits of the cauſe; I ſay, to deal

thus in the diſtribution of juſtice, is reſpect of perſons. Otherwiſe in matters of mere grace and favour, reſpect of perſons hath no place, according to that common rule of divines, προσωπολημψια *locum non habet in gratuitis, ſed in debitis.* Now this the ſcripture every where ſpeaks of, as a thing very far from God. Deut. x. 17. *The Lord your God is the God of Gods, and Lord of Lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not perſons, nor taketh rewards.* 2 Chron. xix. 7. *There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor reſpect of perſons, nor taking of gifts.* Job xxxiv. 18, 19. *Is it fit to ſay to a King, Thou art wicked? or to Princes, Ye are ungodly? how much leſs to him that accepteth not the perſons of Princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they are all the work of his hands.* Rom. ii. 6. *Who will render to every man according to his deeds: for there is no reſpect of perſons with God.* Acts x. 34, 35. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no reſpecter of perſons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him,* Eph. vi. 8, 9. The Apoſtle there preſſeth the duties of ſervants to maſters, from this conſideration, that *whatſoever good thing any man doth, the ſame ſhall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free*; and at the 9th verſe, *Ye maſters do the ſame thing unto them, forbearing threatening; knowing that your maſter alſo is in heaven, neither is there reſpect of perſons with him.* He maketh this likewiſe an argument, why men ſhould not oppreſs and deal deceitfully one with another, Col. iii. 25. *But he that doth wrong, ſhall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no reſpect of perſons.* And in general, St. Peter urgeth this conſideration upon all men, to deter them from ſin in any kind, 1 Pet. i. 17. *And if ye call on the father, who without reſpect of perſons judgeth according to every man's work, paſs the time of your ſojourning here in fear.*

And beſides that the ſcripture doth remove this at the greateſt diſtance from God, it gives us alſo ſeveral inſtances of the impartiality of the divine juſtice, that it is not to be perverted and turned aſide by a-

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ny of those extrinsical considerations which commonly sway with men; it is not to be prevailed with and overcome by flattery and intreaties, Mat. vii. 21, 22. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven,* &c. The divine justice is not to be imposed upon by good words, and external shews, and false professions; so neither by any external relation to him; *For many shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into utter darkness.*

And however men may bear up themselves now upon their worldly greatness and power, certainly there is a time coming, when the greatest persons in the world, those who overturn kingdoms, and lay waste countries, and oppress and ruin millions of mankind for the gratifying of their own lusts and ambition, I say, there is a day coming, when even these, as much, nay, more than others, shall fear and tremble before the impartial justice of God. Rev. vi. 15. *And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bond man, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains: For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?* The impartial justice of God will treat the greatest and the meanest persons alike. Rev. xx. 12. *I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.* All judged *according to their works.*

I should next proceed to vindicate the justice of God in the distribution of rewards and punishments, from those objections, which seem to impeach it. But before I enter upon this, it will be convenient to satisfy one question, which hath occasioned great disputes in the world, and that is, how far justice, especially as to the punishment of offenders, is essen-

tial to God? And for the clearing of this matter, I ſhall briefly lay down theſe propoſitions:

Firſt, I take this for a certain and undoubted truth, that every perfection is eſſential to God, and cannot be imagined to be ſeparated from the divine nature, becauſe this is the natural notion which men have of God, that he is a being that hath all perfection.

Secondly, The actual conſtant exerciſe of thoſe divine perfections, the effects whereof are without himſelf, is not eſſential to God. For inſtance, though God be eſſentially powerful and good, yet it is not neceſſary, that he ſhould always exerciſe his power and goodneſs, but at ſuch times, and in ſuch a manner, as ſeems beſt to his wiſdom; and this is likewiſe true of his wiſdom and juſtice, becauſe theſe are perfections, the effects whereof are terminated upon ſomething without himſelf.

Thirdly, It is eſſential to God to love goodneſs, and hate ſin, wherever he ſees them. It is not neceſſary there ſhould be a world, or reaſonable creatures in it: but upon ſuppoſition that God makes ſuch creatures, it is agreeable to the divine nature, to give them good and righteous laws, to encourage them in the doing of that which is good, and to diſcourage them from doing that which is evil; which cannot be done, but by rewards and puniſhments; and therefore it is agreeable to the perfection of the divine nature, to reward goodneſs, and to puniſh ſin.

Fourthly, As for thoſe rewards which the goſpel promiſeth, and the puniſhments which it threatens, there is ſome difference to be made between the rewarding and puniſhing juſtice of God.

1. As for that abundant reward God is pleaſed to promiſe to good men, the promiſe of it is founded in his goodneſs; and the performance of that promiſe, in his juſtice; for it is juſtice to perform what he promiſes, though the promiſe of ſo great and abundant a reward was mere goodneſs.

2. As for the puniſhing juſtice of God, about which hath been the great queſtion, whether that be eſ-

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sential to God or not, it seems very plain, that it is not necessary that God should inflict those judgments which he threatens, because he hath threatened them; for there is not the like obligation upon persons to perform their threatenings, that there is to perform their promises; because God by his promise becomes a debtor to those to whom he makes the promise; but when he threatens, he is the creditor, and we are debtors to his justice; and as a creditor, he may remit the punishment which he hath threatened: But then if we consider God as loving goodness and hating sin; if we look upon him as governor of the world, and concerned to preserve good order, to encourage holiness and righteousness, and to discountenance sin, under this consideration it is essential to him to punish sin at such times, and in such manner and circumstances, as seems best to his wisdom.

And I am not at all moved by that, which is urged by some learned men to the contrary, that if punishing justice were essential to God, then he must punish the sinner immediately, so soon as he hath offended, and to the utmost of his power; because whatever acts naturally, acts necessarily, and to the utmost: For I do not suppose such a justice essential to God as acts necessarily, but such a justice, which as to the time, and manner, and circumstances of its acting, is regulated and determined by his wisdom; and there is the same reason likewise of his goodness.

I come now to the objections, which are taken partly from the dispensations of God in this world, and partly from the punishments of the other.

First, As to the dispensations of God in this world, there are these two things objected against the justice of the divine providence.

I. The inequality of God's dealings with good and bad men in this world.

II. The translation of punishments, punishing one man's sin upon another, as the sins of the fathers upon the children, of the Prince upon the people. I begin with the

I. Objection. The inequality of God's dealing with good and bad men in this world. In this life things

things happen promiſcuouſly, *there is one event to the righteous and the wicked*; if the wicked ſuffer and are afflicted, ſo are the righteous; if the righteous ſometimes flouriſh, ſo do the wicked: And is not this unjuſt, that thoſe who are ſo unequal as to their deſerts, ſhould be equally dealt withal? Or if there be any inequality, it is uſually the wrong way; the wicked do, many times, proſper more in the world, and the righteous are frequently more afflicted. This was the great objection of old againſt the providence of God, which the heathen Philoſophers took ſo much pains to anſwer; nay, it did often ſhake the faith of holy and good men in the Old Teſtament: Job xii. 6. *The tabernacles of robbers proſper, and they that provoke God are ſecure; into whoſe hand God bringeth abundantly*; and chap. xxi. 7, 8, 9. he expoſtulates the ſame matter again: And David ſays, this was a great ſtumbling-block to him, Pſal. lxxiii. 2, 3. and the like we find in the Prophets, Jer. xii. 1. and Hab. i. 13. This objection I have elſewhere conſidered; I ſhall now very briefly offer two or three things, which I hope will be ſufficient to break the force of it.

1. It muſt be granted, that it is not neceſſary to juſtice, to ſhew itſelf immediately, and to diſpenſe rewards and puniſhments ſo ſoon as there are objects for them. This is not thought neceſſary among men; much more ought we to leave it to the wiſdom of God to determine the time and circumſtances of the exerciſing of his juſtice; and we are not to conclude, that the providence of God is unjuſt, if he do not beſtow rewards, and inflict puniſhments, juſt when we think he ſhould.

2. If God intended this life for a ſtate of trial, wherein he would prove the obedience of men, and their free inclination to good or evil; it is not reaſonable to expect that he ſhould follow men with preſent rewards and puniſhments; for that would lay too great a force upon men, ſo that there would hardly be any opportunity of trying them; but, on the contrary, there is all the reaſon in the world to preſume that God ſhould exerciſe the graces and virtues

tues of good men with afflictions and sufferings, and suffer bad men to take their course for a while, and walk in their own ways, without continual checks, by frequent and remarkable judgments upon them so often as they offend.

3. If there be another life after this, wherein men shall be judged *according to their works*, then this objection vanisheth; for that great day will set all things straight, which seem now to be so crooked and irregular. The deferring of rewards and punishments to the most convenient season, is so far from being a reflexion upon the justice of God, that it is highly to the commendation of it. What Claudian says of Ruffinus, a very bad man, whose long impunity had tempted men to call in question the justice of God, is considerable in this case;

Abstulit hunc tandem Ruffini pœna tumultum,
Absolvitque deos.

"The punishment which overtook him at last, "did quiet those tumultuous thoughts, and absolved "the gods from all blame." When men look but a little way, and consider only the present state of things, they are ready to quarrel at the justice of them; but if they would look at the end of things, and have patience to stay till the last, to see the conclusion and winding up of things, they would then acquit God in their thoughts from all those imputations of injustice, which, from the inequality of present dispensations, rash and inconsiderate men are apt to charge him withal.

II. Objection. From the translation of punishments, the punishing of one man's sin upon another, as of *the fathers upon the children*, which God threatens in the second commandment, and did, in some sort, fulfil in Ahab, *in bringing the evil he had threatened him withal in his son's days*, 1 Kings xxi. 29. The punishing the sin of one person upon a people, as that of Achan upon the whole congregation, Josh. xxii. 20. *Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell*

fell on all the congregation of Iſrael? and that man periſhed not alone in his iniquity. And the ſin of David upon the people, 2 Sam. xxiv. when ſeventy thouſand died of the plague, for David's ſin in numbering the people? Now how is this agreeable to juſtice? Is it not a known rule, *Noxa caput ſequitur? Miſchief purſues the ſinner.* What can be more reaſonable, *Quàm ut peccata ſuos teneant authores? Than that mens faults ſhould be charged upon the authors,* and puniſhment fall upon the guilty?

For anſwer to this,

1. It is not unreaſonable that one man ſhould bear the puniſhment of another's fault, if he be willing and content to bear it: *Volenti non fit injuria; There is no wrong done to thoſe that are willing to undergo it,* though they be innocent; which was the caſe of our bleſſed Saviour ſuffering for us, *the juſt for the unjuſt,* as the ſcripture expreſſeth it.

2. Where the perſon upon whom the puniſhment is transferred, is likewiſe a ſinner, and obnoxious to God, there can be no injuſtice, becauſe he hath deſerved it upon his own account, and God may take what occaſion he pleaſeth to puniſh them that deſerve to be puniſhed.

3. In puniſhing *the iniquity of the father upon the children,* the guilty perſon, that is, the father, is puniſhed in the calamity of his children; for a man's children are himſelf multiplied: and therefore it is very remarkable, that in the ſecond commandment, God promiſeth *to ſhew mercy to thouſands of generations of them that love him;* but *he viſits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children* but to *the third and fourth generation,* that is ſo far as a man may live to ſee them puniſhed, and ſuffer in their puniſhment.

4. As to the puniſhment of the people for the ſins of their princes and governors, and one part of a community for another, ſuppoſing all of them to be ſinners, which is the true caſe, God may lay the puniſhment where he pleaſeth; and there is no more injuſtice than when a man is whipt on the back for the

the theft which his hand committed, a community being one body: Beſides, the Prince is puniſhed in the loſs of his people, the glory of a King conſiſting in the multitude of his ſubjects.

The objection with reſpect to the other world, the puniſhment of temporal evils with eternal, is elſewhere anſwered.

The uſe we ſhould make of this whole diſcourſe is,

Firſt, If God be juſt and righteous, let us acknowledge it in all his diſpenſations, even in thoſe, the reaſon whereof is more hidden and obſcure: Nehemiah ix. 33. ſpeaking of the great afflictions that had befallen God's own people, yet this he lays down as a firm principle, *Howbeit, thou art juſt, in all that is brought upon us.*

Secondly, This is matter of terror to wicked men. God doth now exerciſe his milder attributes towards ſinners, his mercy, and patience, and goodneſs: but if we deſpiſe theſe, that terrible attribute of his juſtice will diſplay itſelf; and this the ſcripture deſcribes in a ſevere manner; *The Lord revengeth, and is jealous; the Lord will take vengeance on his adverſaries,* and *reſerveth wrath for his enemies.*

Thirdly, This is matter of comfort to good men, that the righteous God governs the world, and will judge it: *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice,* Pſal. xcvii. 1. and he gives the reaſon of it in the next verſe; *Righteouſneſs and judgment are the habitation of his throne.* Though he be omnipotent, we need not fear; for his power is always under the conduct of eternal righteouſneſs.

Fourthly, Let us imitate this righteouſneſs; let us endeavour *to be righteous as he is righteous*; let us give to God the love, reverence, and obedience which are due to him; and in all our dealings, what is juſt and due to men. This duty hath an immutable reaſon, founded in the nature of God.

SER-

SERMON CXLI.

The truth of God.

DEUT. xxxii. 4.
—— *A God of Truth.*

IN ſpeaking to this attribute, I ſhall,

I. Shew you what we are to underſtand by the truth of God.

II. Endeavour to prove that this perfection belongs to God, that he is *a God of truth.*

III. Anſwer ſome objections that may be made againſt it; and then make ſome uſe of it.

I. What we are to underſtand by the truth of God. I ſhall take it as the ſcripture uſeth it in a large ſenſe, ſo as to include not only the veracity of God, but his faithfulneſs. Hence it is that, in ſcripture, truth and faithfulneſs are ſo often put together, and frequently put one for another: Iſai. xxv. 1. *Thy counſels of old are faithfulneſs and truth.* Rev. xxi. 5. *Theſe words are true and faithful.* And the faithfulneſs of God in performing his promiſes, is frequently called his truth. And becauſe the ſcripture uſeth them promiſcuouſly, we need not be very ſolicitous to find out diſtinct notions of them: but if you will, they may be diſtinguiſhed thus: the truth or veracity of God hath place in every declaration of his mind; the faithfulneſs of God, only in his promiſes.

For the *firſt*, The veracity or truth of God: this hath place in every declaration of his mind; and ſignifies an exact correſpondence and conformity between his word and his mind, and conſequently between his word and the truth and reality of things. The correſpondence of his word with his mind, depends upon the rectitude of his will; the conformity

ty of his word with the reality of things, not only upon the rectitude of his will, but the perfection of his knowledge, and the infallibility of his understanding: so that when we say God is true, or speaks truth, we mean thus, that his words are a plain declaration of his mind, and the true representation of things, in opposition to falshood, which is speaking otherwise than than the thing is; and hypocrisy, that is, speaking otherwise than we think. For instance; when God declares any thing to be so, or not to be so, to have been thus, or not to have been thus; the thing really is so, and he thinks so; when he expresseth his desire of any thing, he does really desire it; when he commands any thing, or forbids us any thing, it is really his mind and will that we should do what he commands, and avoid what he forbids; when he declares and foretells any thing future, it really shall come to pass, and he really intended it should; if the declaration be to be understood absolutely, it shall absolutely come to pass; if the declaration be to be understood conditionally, it shall come to pass, and he intends it shall, if the condition be performed.

Secondly, The faithfulness of God. This only hath place in his promises, in which there is an obligation of justice superadded to his word; for God, by his promise, doth not only declare what he intends, and what shall be; but confers a right upon them to whom the promise is made, so as that the breach of his promise would not only cast an imputation upon his truth, but upon his justice.

II. That this perfection belongs to God. And this I shall endeavour to prove,

First, From the dictates of natural light.

Secondly, From scripture.

First, From the dictates of natural light. Natural light tells us, that truth and faithfulness are perfections, and consequently belong to the divine nature; and that falshood and a lie are imperfections, and to be removed from God. There is nothing that is esteemed amongst men a greater contumely and reproach, than to give a man the lie, to call him a liar, because it is an argument of so much baseness,

and of a low, and mean, and servile spirit; the usual temptation to it being fear of losing some advantage, or incurring some danger. Hence was that saying, that *it is the property of a slave to lie, but of a free man to speak truth:* Now, whatever argues baseness or imperfection, our reason tells us is infinitely to be separated from the most perfect Being. *God cannot be tempted with evil,* the divine nature being all-sufficient, can have no temptation to be otherwise than good, and just, and true, and faithful. Men are tempted to lie by advantage, and out of fear: but the divine nature hath the security of its fulness and all-sufficiency, that it cannot hope for any increase, nor fear any impairment of its estate. Men are unfaithful, and break their words, either because they are rash and inconsiderate in passing of them, or forgetful in minding them, or inconstant in keeping of them, or impotent and unable to perform them: But none of these are incident to God; his infinite wisdom, and perfect knowledge, and clear foresight of all events, secure him both from inconsiderateness, and inconstancy, and forgetfulness; and his infinite power renders him able to perform what he hath spoken, and to make good his word. And that these are the natural dictates and suggestions of our minds, appears clearly from the reasonings of the Heathen in this matter; who were destitute of divine revelation. Plato, *de repub.* lib. 2. lays down this as a certain truth, "That lying and falshood "are imperfections, and odious to God and men;" Τὸ μὲν Ψεῦδος οὐ μόνον ὑπὸ θεῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπ' ἀνθρώπων μισεῖται. And afterwards he tells us, "That "the divine nature is free from all temptations here-"to, either from advantage or fear;" οὐκ ἄρ' ἐστὶν οὗ ἕνεκα ἂν θεὸς ψεύδοιτο· πάντη ἄρα ἀψευδὲς τὸ θεῖον; and concludes, "therefore God is true, and "deals plainly with us, both in his words and "actions, and is neither changed himself, nor de-"ceives us." Porphyry, in the life of Pythagoras, tells us, "That this was one of his precepts, Μάλιστα "δ' ἀληθεύειν, τοῦτο γὰρ μόνον δύνασθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώ-"πους ποιεῖν θεῷ παραπλησίους." And afterwards he adds,

adds, "That truth is so great a perfection, that if "God would render himself visible to men, he "would choose *light for his body, and truth for his "soul.*"

Secondly, From scripture. The scripture doth very frequently attribute this to God, 2 Sam. vii. 28. *And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true.* Psal. xxv. 10. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth.* Psal. xxxi. 5. *Into thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.* Rev. iii. 7. *These things saith he that is holy, he that is true.* —— vi. 10. *How long, O Lord, holy and true?* —— xv. 3. *Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.* —— xvi. 7. *True and righteous are thy judgments.* Hither we may refer those texts which speak of the plenty and abundance of God's truth: Exod. xxxiv. 6. *Abundant in goodness and truth.* Psal. lxxxvi. 15. *Plenteous in mercy and truth*; and those which speak of the duration and eternity of it: Psal. c. 5. *And his truth endureth to all generations.* —— cxvii. 2. *And the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.* —— cxlvi. 6. *Who keepeth truth for ever.*

As the scripture doth attribute this perfection to God, so it removes the contrary from him with the greatest abhorrence and detestation: Numb. xxiii. 19. *God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall not he do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* They are Balaam's words, but God put them into his mouth. 1 Sam. xv. 29. *The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for he is not a man that he should repent.* Rom. iii. 4. *Yea, let God be true, and every man a liar.* Nay, the scripture goes further; does not only remove lying and falsehood, and inconstancy from God, but speaks of these as things impossible to the divine nature: Tit. i. 2. *In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began.* Heb. vi. 18. *That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who*

have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope ſet before us.

And the ſcripture doth not only in general attribute this perfection to God, but doth more particularly aſſure us of his ſincerity, and truth and faithfulneſs. Of his ſincerity, that he deals plainly with us, and ſpeaks what he intends, that his words are the image of his thoughts, and a true repreſentation of his mind. God is very careful to remove this jealouſy out of the minds of men, who are apt to entertain unworthy thoughts of God, as if notwithſtanding all that he hath declared, he had a ſecret deſign to ruin men; therefore he interpoſeth his oath for our greater aſſurance, Ezek. xxxiii. 11. *As I live, ſaith the Lord God, I have no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live.* When God ſpeaks to us, he ſpeaks his mind, and hath no deſign to circumvent and poſſeſs us with error and deluſion: If he offer life and happineſs, we may believe he is real; and that if he did not intend to beſtow it upon us, or if there were no ſuch thing as a future glory, he would not have declared it to us: this was the temper of our Saviour, who was the expreſs image of the Father, *full of grace and truth.* John xiv. 2. *In my Father's houſe are many manſions; if it were not ſo, I would have told you.*

And as the ſcripture aſſures us of his ſincerity, ſo of his truth and faithfulneſs in the accompliſhment of all his predictions, and performance of all his promiſes. As for the truth of his predictions, and certain accompliſhment of them, the ſcripture frequently uſeth this proverbial ſpeech, to aſſure us of the certainty of their accompliſhment; *Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall not paſs away*, Matth. xxiv. 35. For the faithfulneſs of God in his promiſes, the ſcripture makes frequent mention of it: Deut. vii. 9. *Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy.* Pſal. lxxxix. 33, 34. *I will not ſuffer my faithfulneſs to fail: My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.*

The

The ſcripture doth record God's punctual and full performance of his promiſes, particularly of that promiſe to Abraham, after four hundred years, to bring the children of Iſrael out of Egypt, *and to give them the land of Canaan for an inheritance*, Gen. xv. 13. the punctual accompliſhment you have recorded, Exod. xii. 41. *And it came to paſs, at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the ſelf-ſame day it came to paſs, that all the hoſts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.* See likewiſe Joſh. xxi. 44, 45. and xxiii. 14. 1 Kings viii. 56. And upon this account it is, that God is ſo frequently in ſcripture ſtiled *the God that keepeth covenant*, 1 Kings viii. 23. Nehem. i. 5. —— ix. 32. and in ſeveral other places. And ſo likewiſe of predictions of evil to come, God is true in fulfilling his word, 1 Sam. xv. 29. when the Prophet had threatened Saul to rent the kingdom from him, he adds, *the ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie, nor repent; for he is not a man that he ſhould repent.*

III. I come to remove ſome objections that may be made againſt the truth and faithfulneſs of God.

Firſt, It is objected againſt the ſincerity of God, and his plain dealing, that he is ſometimes repreſented in ſcripture, as inſpiring Prophets with falſe meſſages, 1 Kings xxii. 20, &c. Jer. iv. 10. —— xx. 7. Ezek. xiv. 9.

Anſw. As to three of theſe texts, it is a known Hebraiſm to expreſs things in an imperative and active form, which are to be underſtood only permiſſively. So where *the devils beſought Chriſt, that he would ſuffer them to enter into the herd of ſwine, he ſaid unto them, Go*, Matth. viii. 31. He did not command, but permit them. And ſo John xiii. 27. where our Saviour ſays to Judas, *What thou doſt, do quickly*; we are not to underſtand, that he commanded him to betray him, though that ſeem to be expreſſed in the form. So likewiſe here, where an evil ſpirit offered himſelf to be a lying ſpirit in the mouth of the Prophet; and God ſays, *Go forth, and do ſo*; this only ſignifies a permiſſion, not a command. And ſo Jer. iv. 10. where the Prophet complains that God

had greatly deceived the people, *saying, they should have peace, when the sword reached to the soul*; we are to understand this no other ways, but that God permitted the false Prophets to deceive them, prophesying peace to them; as appears by the history. Ezek. xiv. 9. *I the Lord have deceived that Prophet*, that is, *permitted him to be deceived, and to deceive the people*, as a just judgment upon them for their infidelity, with respect to his true Prophets. This he threatens at the 5th verse; *I will take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols*; because they have chosen to themselves false gods, I will suffer them to be deceived with false prophets: And that this is the meaning, appears by the threatening added, *and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and I will destroy him from the midst of my people.* Now God will not punish that whereof he is the author.

That text, Jer. xx. 7. *Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived*, signifies no more, but that he had mistaken the promise of God to him, who, when he gave him his commission, told him he would be with him, by which he understood that no evil should come to him, and now he was become a derision, and the people mocked him; and in his passion and weakness, he breaks forth into this expression, *Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived*; whereas it was his own mistake of the meaning of God's promise, which was not that he should not meet with scorn, and opposition, and persecution, but that they should not prevail against him, as you may see at the latter end of the first chapter.

Second Objection against the faithfulness of God, as to the performance of his promise. It is objected, That God did not give the children of Israel all the land which he promised to Abraham; as will appear by comparing Gen. xviii. 19, 20. with Josh. xiii. 1. *&c.* and Judg. ii. 20, 21. Gen. xv. 18. God promised to give Abraham and his seed such a land, the bounds whereof he describes, Josh. xiii. 1. it is said there, that there remained very much land yet unconquered, which they had not got the possession of.

And

And Judg. ii. 20. it is ſaid, that the people having not performed their part of the covenant, God would ſuſpend the further performance of his promiſe, and would not drive out any more of the nations before them; and it is probable that the Iſraelites never were poſſeſſed of the promiſed land in the full latitude and extent of the promiſe.

Anſw. This covenant of God with Abraham, was upon conſideration of his paſt faith and obedience, though it ſeems the full performance of it did likewiſe depend upon the future obedience of his poſterity; in purſuance of this covenant, notwithſtanding all the murmurings and rebellions of that people, God did bring them into the promiſed land, though they provoked him to deſtroy them many a time; becauſe he remembred his covenant with Abraham; when they were poſſeſſed of it, God gave them a title to the reſt, and would have aſſiſted them in the conqueſt of it, if they had performed the condition required on their part, that is, continued faithful and obedient to him: but they did not, and thereby diſcharged God from any further performance of his promiſe: and God, when he had done this, had fully performed the covenant he made with Abraham, ſo far as concerned his part, as appears by the acknowledgment of Joſhua, even in a time when a great part of the land was unconquered, Joſh. xxi. 44. and of Solomon, 1 Kings viii. 56. yea, and had it not been that God had made this covenant, as well upon conſideration of Abraham's faith and obedience, as upon condition of the future obedience of his poſterity, the rebellions and diſobedience of the people in the wilderneſs had releaſed God wholly from the promiſe; and he had not been unfaithful if he had deſtroyed utterly that people, and made a full end of them, and they had never entered into that land; becauſe a failure of the condition doth make the obligation to ceaſe: And that this condition was implied in this covenant with Abraham, appears by theſe texts, Deut. vii. 12, 13. —— xi. 22, 23, 32. and Judg. ii. 20, 21. God gives this reaſon why he ſuſpended the compleat performance of his promiſe;

The

The anger of the Lord was hot againſt Iſrael, and he ſaid, Becauſe that this people hath tranſgreſſed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice, I alſo will not henceforth drive out any from before them, of the nations which Joſhua left when he died.

Third Objection: God is not punctual in performing his threatenings; as when he threatened Adam, Gen. ii. 17. *In the day thou eateſt thereof, thou ſhalt ſurely dy*; which yet was not accompliſhed, for he lived many hundred years after. God threatened *Ahab to bring evil upon him and his family*, 1 Kings xxi. 21. but, upon his humiliation, he is pleaſed to reſpite it, ver. 29. So God threatened Hezekiah with death, but, upon his prayer, *adds fifteen years to his life*, 2 Kings xx. 6. Thus Nineveh was threatened, but, upon their repentance, *God repented of the evil*, Jonah iii. 10. Now, how is this deferring and turning away of judgment conſiſtent with the truth of God? Doth not this ſeem to charge him with falſhood or levity?

Anſw. This may be ſaid in general, That every one that underſtands the nature of God, cannot but be very well aſſured, that falſhood and levity are very far from God; and though he could not unty ſome particular knots, and anſwer all difficulties, yet he ought to reſt ſatisfied in this aſſurance. I confeſs this objection is troubleſome, and requires a diſtinct conſideration. I will not be peremptory in nice matters, but I ſhall, with ſubmiſſion, offer theſe things in anſwer to it:

1. As for the expreſſion of God's repenting, we are to underſtand it, as many others in ſcripture, after the manner of men, and ſpoken by way of condeſcenſion to our weakneſs, and accommodated to our capacities, and not as caſting any imputation of falſhood or inconſtancy upon God, as if either he did not intend what he ſaith, or out of levity did alter his mind. When God is ſaid to repent, the expreſſion only ſignifies thus much, that God doth not execute that which ſeemed to us to have been his purpoſe, that he is pleaſed to do otherwiſe than his threatenings ſeemed openly to expreſs, becauſe of ſome

ſome tacit condition implied in them; and this doth not derogate either from the truth, or ſincerity, or conſtancy of God in his word. Not from his truth; for he ſpeaks what he intends really, if ſomething did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened upon which he was reſolved, when he threatened, to be taken off, and ſtop his judgments: Nor doth it derogate from his ſincerity and plainneſs; for he hath told us, that his threatenings have ſuch conditions implied in them: Nor doth it derogate from the conſtancy and immutability of God; becauſe God doth not *mutare conſilium, ſed ſententiam; he doth not change his counſel and purpoſe, but takes off the ſentence* which he had paſſed with reſerved conditions.

2. As to the inſtances, that I may give more particular ſatisfaction to them, I ſhall conſider the threatenings of God with this double reſpect, either with relation to a law, or with relation to the event; with relation to a law, as they are the ſanction of it; or with relation to the event, as they are predictions of ſomething to come.

(1.) Some threatenings have only relation to a law, as they are the ſanction of it. And thus conſidered, they differ from promiſes; for promiſes confer a right, *Omne promiſſum cadit in debitum*; but a threatening doth not convey any right, nor, if forborn, can the party complain of wrong done to him; and therefore, in this caſe, it can only ſignify what the offence againſt the law deſerves, and what the offender may expect; for the end of threatening is not puniſhment, but the avoiding of it. And this may anſwer the firſt inſtance. God gave Adam a law; and, by way of ſanction, not of prediction of an event, he threatened the breach of it with death: Now God did not execute the puniſhment threatened at the time threatened, but deferred it, and this without any impeachment of his juſtice or truth, becauſe this threatening was only the ſanction of the law.

(2.) We may conſider threatenings with relation to the event, and as predictions; and as to the accompliſhment of theſe, there ſeems to be a greater de-

degree of neceſſity, becauſe the honour of God's knowledge and power and truth, ſeems to be concerned in them; for if his word be not fulfilled, it muſt either be for want of knowledge to foreſee events, or power to bring them to paſs, or conſtancy to his word. Now if we conſider threatenings with reſpect to the event, as they are predictions of future judgments, I think all the other inſtances may be ſatisfied, by laying down this rule for the underſtanding of them, *viz.* "That all prophetical "threatenings or predictions of judgments are to be "underſtood with this tacit condition, if there do "not intervene the humiliation and repentance, and "prayer of the perſons againſt whom the judgment "is threatened; and if ſo, God may, upon repen-"tance, without any impeachment of the honour of "his truth, or knowledge, or power, either defer, or "abate, or remit the puniſhment." And that the predictions of judgments are to be underſtood with this condition, appears clearly from that known text, Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

I come now to the laſt thing I propoſed, to make ſome uſe of this doctrine.

Firſt, If God be *a God of truth*, then this gives us aſſurance that he doth not deceive us, that the faculties which he hath given us are not falſe; but when they have clear perceptions of things, they do not err and miſtake. Were it not for the veracity of God, we might, for any thing we know, be under a conſtant deluſion; and no man could demonſtrate the contrary, but that this is our make, and our temper, and the very frame of our underſtandings, to be then moſt of all deceived, when we think our ſelves to be moſt certain; I ſay, no man could be aſſured of the contrary, but from hence, becauſe veracity and truth is a divine perfection; and therefore God cannot be the author of error and deluſion. Therefore we may be aſſured, that the frame of our underſtanding is not a cheat, but that our faculties are true, and, unleſs it be our own fault, we need not be deceived in things that are neceſſary to our happineſs.

Secondly,

Secondly, If God be a God of truth, then there is reaſon why we ſhould believe and aſſent to whatever we are ſatisfied is revealed to us by God. A divine revelation is a ſufficient ground for the moſt firm aſſent; for this very thing, that any thing is revealed by God, is the higheſt evidence, and ought to give us the moſt firm aſſurance of the truth of it. Hence it is, that the word of God is called *the word of truth*, yea, and *truth itſelf*, John xvii. 17. *Thy word is truth.*

Therefore, whoever entertains the ſcriptures as the word of God, and is ſatisfied of the divine authority of them, ought, in reaſon, to believe every thing contained in them yea, though there be ſome things of which no reaſonable account can be given, and which our reaſon and underſtanding cannot give us particular ſatisfaction in; yet, becauſe we are ſatisfied that they are revealed by God, *who cannot lie*, whoſe knowledge is infallible, and whoſe word is true, we ought, upon this higher and ſuperior reaſon, to yield a firm aſſent to the truth of them: If we do not, we diſhonour this perfection of God, and rob him of this eſſential property, his *veracity*: 1 John v. 10. *He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witneſs in himſelf: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, becauſe he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.* As, on the other hand, if we do believe what God hath revealed, we glorify this perfection of his, and ſet our ſeal to his veracity. So it is ſaid of Abraham, Rom. iv. 20. that *he was ſtrong in faith, giving glory to God.* And St. John the baptiſt, ſpeaking concerning our Saviour, ſaith, John iii. 33. *He that hath received his teſtimony, hath ſet to his ſeal, that God is true.*

Thirdly, If God be a God of truth, and faithful in performing his promiſe, then here is a firm foundation for our hope and truſt. If God have made any promiſe, we may ſecurely rely upon it, that it ſhall be made good; we may *hold faſt* our hope *without wavering, becauſe he is faithful who hath promiſed,*

promiſed, Heb. x. 23. Hence it is, that the bleſſings of God's covenant are called *ſure mercies*, Iſa. lv. 3.

We attribute much to the word of a faithful friend, and look upon the promiſe of an honeſt man as very good ſecurity; but men may fail us when we rely upon them: but *God is true*, though *all men ſhould prove liars*. Men are fickle and mutable, but the nature of God is fixed, he cannot fail thoſe that truſt in him. When God hath made any promiſe to us, we may plead it with him, and urge him with his faithfulneſs. So we find David did, 2 Sam. vii. 25, *&c.*

Only we ſhould be careful to perform the condition which is required on our part, Heb. iv. 1. we ſhould *take heed, leſt a promiſe being left us, any one ſhould come ſhort of it*, by not performing the condition; for that doth releaſe and diſcharge him of the promiſe; and *he is faithful*, though he doth not perform what he promiſed, becauſe he did not promiſe, but upon condition: And this ſeems to be the meaning of thoſe words, 2 *Tim.* ii. 13. *If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himſelf.* He ſaid before, that if we perform the conditions required, God will beſtow the bleſſings promiſed: *It is a faithful ſaying; for if we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him; if we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him:* But *if we deny him*, the curſe threatened will then take place, and *he will deny us*; and God is *not unfaithful* in doing this, *he does not deny himſelf.*

Now, if we have ſuch aſſurance, we may truſt him with our greateſt concernments, and venture our ſouls with him, Pſal. xxxi. 5. *Into thine hand I commit my ſpirit; thou haſt redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.* We ſhould rely upon him, when there are the greateſt improbabilities of the accompliſhment of his promiſes. Thus did Abraham, Rom. iv. 17, *&c.*

This ſhould make us alſo *patient in hope*: If a promiſe be not ſpeedily accompliſhed, we ſhould not be dejected, or diſquieted. David challengeth himſelf upon

upon this account, Pſal xlii. 11. *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? and why art thou diſquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I ſhall yet praiſe him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* And ſo likewiſe in reference to the rewards of another world, though at a diſtance; yet we ſhould, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *wait for the bleſſed hope.*

Fourthly, The truth of God is matter of terror to the wicked. All the threatenings of temporal evils may juſtly be expected, becauſe their ſins deſerve them, and there is no condition implied in them, upon which thou canſt reaſonably hope for the avoiding or abating of the evils threatened, but of humiliation and repentance: And if, notwithſtanding theſe threatenings, thou continueſt in thy ſins, and *bleſſeſt thyſelf, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, though thou walk in the imaginations of thy heart*; by this very thing thou provokeſt the juſtice of God, not to ſpare thee, and makeſt *his wrath and jealouſy to ſmoke againſt thee*; and if thou continueſt impenitent, however he may defer the execution of temporal evils, his truth and veracity is concerned to inflict eternal puniſhments upon thee; for *he hath ſworn in his wrath*, that ſuch *ſhall not enter into his reſt.*

Fifthly, Let us propound to our ſelves the truth of God for our pattern and imitation. Would you be like God? be true and faithful. Truth and faithfulneſs are divine perfections; but lying and falſhood are the properties of the Devil, and the predominant qualities of hell. The character of the devil is, *that he abode not in the truth, and there is no truth in him: when he ſpeaketh a lie, it is of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it*, John viii. 44.

One of the firſt and moſt natural notions that we have of religion, is, That it is to imitate God, and to endeavour to be like him, ſo far as we are capable; and to contradict any of the divine excellencies and perfections, is the higheſt ſin; becauſe it is againſt the cleareſt dictates of our mind, and contrary to thoſe principles which are moſt deeply rooted in our nature. No man can be cruel and unmerciful, falſe and treacherous, without a very high degree of

guilt; becauſe theſe ſins are contrary to the chiefeſt and moſt eſſential perfections of God. Lying is a ſin that would fly in the face of an Heathen, becauſe it directly contradicts thoſe natural notions which every man hath of God and religion; therefore we find that there is hardly any thing that men are more aſhamed of than *to be taken in a lie*, and it is eſteemed the higheſt reproach to be charged with it; it argues ſuch a direct contrariety to that which is the rule of perfection, the nature of God, and conſequently ſo much imperfection and baſeneſs; he that tells a lie out of fear, is at once bold towards God, and baſe towards men.

Upon theſe accounts God expreſſeth himſelf highly offended with thoſe that practiſe lying and falſhood, and to have a deteſtation of them; Prov. xii. 22. *Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.* It renders us unlike to him, Eph. iv. 24, 25. *Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs, (*or *in the holineſs of truth.)* And from hence he infers, *Wherefore putting away lying, ſpeak every man truth to his neighbour: for we are members one of another.* Col. iii. 9, 10. *Lie not one to another, ſeeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him*; that is, becauſe we profeſs to be *conformed to the image of God.* More particularly, we ſhould charge ourſelves with truth and faithfulneſs towards God and men.

1. *Towards God,* in our oaths and vows and covenants. In our oaths, when we ſwear in any matter, we tell God that what we ſpeak is truth, and invoke him to bear witneſs to it. To falſify in an oath, is one of the moſt ſolemn affronts that we can put upon the God of truth.

And ſo in our vows, which are a ſolemn promiſe to God, in ſuch things in which we have no precedent obligation lying upon us. He that regardeth truth, will neither be raſh in making a vow, nor careleſs to perform it; Eccleſ. v. 4. *When thou vowe'ſt a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleaſure*

pleaſure in fools. Not to perform what we have vowed, is an argument of folly, either of raſhneſs in the making of it, or of inconſtancy in not keeping it.

So likewiſe in all our covenants with God, to ſerve him, and obey him, and keep his commandments, we ſhould ſtrictly charge ourſelves with performance of theſe. There is a natural obligation upon us to theſe things, from the very law of our creation, though we ſhould never ſolemnly make any ſuch promiſe, nor enter into any ſuch engagements, becauſe it is a tacit condition of our beings: but the taking of this covenant ſolemnly upon us in baptiſm, ſtrengthens the obligation, and makes our unfaithfulneſs the greater ſin. All our hopes of happineſs, are founded in the faithfulneſs of God; and if thou be falſe to him, how canſt thou expect he ſhould be faithful to thee? It is true, indeed, that *he abides faithful, he cannot deny himſelf*; but if thou haſt any ingenuity in thee, this ſhould be an argument to thee to be faithful to him; I am ſure this can be no encouragement to thee to be unfaithful: for if thou breakeſt the covenant thou haſt entred into, and neglecteſt the conditions upon which God hath ſuſpended the performance of his promiſe, thou diſchargeſt the obligation on his part.

2. *Towards men:* We ſhould charge ourſelves with truth in all our words, and faithfulneſs in all our promiſes. It becomes us who worſhip the God of truth, to ſpeak truth; to uſe plainneſs and ſincerity in all our words; to abhor falſhood and diſſimulation, and thoſe more refined ways of lying, by equivocation of words, and ſecret reſervations of our minds, on purpoſe to deceive. Thoſe that plead for theſe, it is a ſign they do not underſtand the nature of God, and of religion; which is, to conform ourſelves to the divine perfections. We meet with many complaints in the Old Teſtament, of the want of truth and faithfulneſs among men: Pſal. xii. 1, 2. Iſa. lix. 13, 14, 15. Jer. vii. 2, 8, 9. ——— ii. 4, 5, 6. Hoſ. iv. 1. I am afraid there is as much reaſon for this complaint now; for we live in an age of

greater light, which doth reprove and make manifeſt this work of darkneſs; and methinks there is no ſadder ſign of the decay of Chriſtianity, and of the little power and influence that the goſpel hath upon us, than that there is ſo little regard had by Chriſtians to theſe moral duties; which, becauſe moral, (however men may ſlight that word) are therefore of eternal and indiſpenſable obligation, having their foundation in the nature of God.

To conclude all: That man that can diſpenſe with himſelf as to moral duties, that makes no conſcience of telling a lie, or breaking his word; what badge ſoever he may wear, what title ſoever he may call himſelf by, it is as impoſſible that ſuch a man ſhould be a true Chriſtian, as it is to reconcile *the God of truth* and the *father of lies*.

SERMON CXLII.

The holineſs of God.

1 PET. i. 16.

Be ye holy, for I am holy.

IN ſpeaking to this attribute, I ſhall,

I. Enquire what we are to underſtand by the holineſs of God.

II. Endeavour to ſhew that this perfection belongs to God.

I. What we are to underſtand by the holineſs of God. There is ſome difficulty in fixing the proper notion of it; for though there be no property more frequently attributed to God, in ſcripture, than this of holineſs, yet there is none of all God's attributes which Divines have ſpoken more ſparingly of, than this.

The general notion of holineſs is, that it is a *ſeparation from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent*

excellent uſe. And this notion of holineſs is applicable either to things or perſons. To things; thus the veſſels of the tabernacle, and the veſtments of the Prieſts, were ſaid to be holy, becauſe they were ſeparated from common uſe, and appropriated to the peculiar and excellent uſe of the ſervice of God. Holineſs of perſons is two-fold; either relative and external, which ſignifies the peculiar relation of a perſon to God; ſuch were called ἱερεῖς, *Prieſts*, or *holy men:* or elſe habitual and inherent; ſuch is the holineſs of good men, and it is a ſeparation from moral imperfection, that is, from ſin and impurity: And this is called ὁσιότης, and the primary notion of it is negative, and ſignifies the abſence and remotion of ſin. And this appears in thoſe explications which the ſcripture gives of it. Thus it is explained by oppoſition to ſin and impurity; 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs*, where holineſs is oppoſed to all filthineſs. Sometimes by the negation of ſin and defilement: So we find *holy, and without blame* put together, Eph. i. 4. *Holy and without blemiſh*, Eph. v. 27. *Holy, harmleſs and undefiled*, Heb. vii. 26. It is true, indeed, this negative notion doth imply ſomething that is poſitive; it doth not only ſignify the abſence of ſin, but a contrariety to it: we cannot conceive the abſence of ſin, without the preſence of grace; as take away crookedneſs from a thing, and it immediately becomes ſtraight. Whenever we are made holy, every luſt and corruption in us is ſupplanted by the contrary grace.

Now this habitual holineſs of perſons, which conſiſts in a ſeparation from ſin, is a conformity to the holineſs of God; and by this we may come to underſtand what holineſs in God is: And it ſignifies *the peculiar eminency of the divine nature, whereby it is ſeparated and removed at an infinite diſtance from moral imperfection, and that which we call ſin*; that is, there is no ſuch thing as malice, or envy, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or tyranny, or injuſtice, or falſhood, or unfaithfulneſs in

God; or, if there be any other thing that ſignifies ſin and vice, and moral imperfection, holineſs ſignifies that the divine nature is at an infinite diſtance from all theſe, and poſſeſſed of the contrary perfections.

Therefore all thoſe texts that remove moral imperfection from God, and declare the repugnancy of it to the divine nature, do ſet forth the holineſs of God: Jam. i. 13. *God cannot be tempted with evil.* Job viii. 3. *Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert juſtice?* Job xxxiv. 10. 12. *Far be it from God that he ſhould do wickedneſs, and from the Almighty, that he ſhould commit iniquity. Yea, ſurely, God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* Rom. ix. 14. *Is there then unrighteouſneſs with God? God forbid.* Zeph. iii. 5. *The juſt Lord is in the midſt thereof, he will not do iniquity.* And ſo falſhood, and unfaithfulneſs, and inconſtancy, Deut. xxxii. 4. *A God of truth, and without inquity.* 1 Sam. xv. 29. *The ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie.* Tit. i. 2. *In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed.* Heb. vi. 18. *That by two immutable things, in which it was impoſſible for God to lie.* Therefore you ſhall find, that holineſs is joined with all the moral perfections of the divine nature, or put for them: Hoſ. xi. 9. *I am the holy One in the midſt of thee*; that is, *the merciful One.* Pſal. cxlv. 17. *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* Rom. vii. 12. *The commandment is holy and juſt, and good.* Rev. iii. 7. *Theſe things ſaith he that is holy, he that is true.* Rev. vi. 10. *How long, O Lord, holy and true?* Pſal. cv. 42. *He remembred his holy promiſe*; holy, that is, in reſpect of the faithfulneſs of it. Iſaiah lv. 3. *The ſure mercies of David,* τὰ ὅσια, *The holy mercies of David,* which will not fail.

So that the holineſs of God is not a particular, but an univerſal perfection, and runs through all the moral perfections of the divine nature; it is the beauty of the divine nature, and the perfection of all his other perfections: Take away this, and you bring an univerſal ſtain and blemiſh upon the divine nature; without holineſs, power would be an oppreſſion;

preſſion; and wiſdom, ſubtilty; and ſovereignty, tyranny; and goodneſs, malice and envy; and juſtice, cruelty; and mercy, fooliſh pity; and truth, falſhood. And therefore the ſcripture ſpeaks of this, as God's higheſt excellency and perfection. God is ſaid to be *glorious in holineſs*, Exod. xv. 11. Holineſs is called God's throne, Pſal. xlvii. 8. *He ſitteth upon the throne of his holineſs.* This is that which makes heaven; Iſa. lxiii. 15. it is called, *The habitation of his holineſs, and of his glory*; as if this were the very nature of God, and the ſum of his perfections. The knowledge of God, is called, The knowledge of the holy One, Prov. ix. 10. *To be made partakers of a divine nature*, and *to be made partakers of God's holineſs*, are equivalent expreſſions, 2 Pet. iii. 4. Heb. xii. 10. And becauſe there is no perfection of God greater, therefore he is repreſented as ſwearing by this; Pſal. lx. 6. *God hath ſpoken in his holineſs.* Pſal. lxxxix. 35. *Once have I ſworn by my holineſs.* The Angels and glorified ſpirits they ſum up the perfections of God in this; Iſa. vi. 3. *And one cried unto another, and ſaid, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hoſts, the whole earth is full of his glory.* Rev. iv. 8. *And they reſt not day and night, ſaying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.* There is no attribute of God ſo often repeated as this; in ſome copies it is nine times.

II. I ſhall endeavour to prove, that this perfection belongs to God,

Firſt, From the light of nature. The Philoſophers, in all their diſcourſes of God, agree in this, that whatever ſounds like vice and imperfection, is to be ſeparated from the divine nature; which is to acknowledge his holineſs. Plato, ſpeaking of our likeneſs to God, ſaith, Ὁμοίωσις δὲ, δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι. Dan. iv. 9. King Nebuchadnezzar calls God by this title, *I know that the ſpirit of the holy gods is in thee.* In a word, whatever hath been produced to prove any of God's moral perfections, proves his holineſs.

Secondly,

Secondly, From ſcripture. There is no title ſo frequently given to God in ſcripture, and ſo often ingeminated, as this of his holineſs. He is called holineſs itſelf, Iſa. lxiii. 15. where heaven is called the habitation of his holineſs, that is, of God. His name is ſaid to be holy, Luke i. 49. *And holy is his name.* He is called *the holy One*, Iſa. xl. 25. *The holy One of Iſrael*, Iſa. xli. 20. *The holy One of Jacob*, Iſa. xxix. 23. He is ſaid to be *holy in all his works and promiſes*, Pſal. cv. 42. *In all his ways and works*, Pſal. cxlv. 17. This title is given to each of the three perſons of the bleſſed Trinity; to God the Father, in innumerable places; to God the Son, Dan. ix. 24. *To anoint the moſt holy.* The Devil cannot deny him this title, Luke iv. 34. *I know thee who thou art, the holy One of God.* And the Spirit of God hath this title conſtantly given it, *The Holy Ghoſt*, or *the Holy Spirit*, or *the Spirit of holineſs*. The ſcripture attributes this perfection in a peculiar manner to God, 1 Sam. ii. 2. *There is none holy as the Lord.* Rev. xv. 4. *For thou only art holy.* Holineſs is a communicable perfection; but no creature can partake of it in ſuch a manner and degree as the divine nature poſſeſſeth it. God is eternally holy, the fountain of holineſs, the creatures are derivatively and by participation holy. God is eminently and tranſcendently ſo: the creatures in a finite degree. God is immutably ſo, it is impoſſible it ſhould be otherwiſe; but no creature is out of an abſolute poſſibility of ſin. In this ſenſe it is ſaid, Job iv. 18. that *he putteth no truſt in his ſervants; and his Angels he chargeth with folly.* And chap. xv. 15. *He putteth no truſt in his ſaints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his ſight.* From all which I ſhall draw theſe inferences:

1. If holineſs be a perfection of the divine nature, and a property of God; if, in the notion of God, there be included an everlaſting ſeparation and diſtance from moral imperfection, an eternal repugnance to ſin and iniquity: from hence we may infer, that there is an intrinſical good and evil in things; and the reaſons and reſpects of moral good and evil do not depend upon any mutable, and inconſtant, and

and arbitrary principle, but are fixed and immutable, eternal and indiſpenſable. Therefore they do not ſeem to me to ſpeak ſo ſafely, who make the divine will, preciſely and abſtractedly conſidered, the rule of moral good and evil; as if there were nothing good or evil in its own nature antecedently to the will of God, but that all things are therefore good or evil, becauſe God wills them to be ſo: For if this were ſo, goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and truth, and faithfulneſs, would not be eſſential, and neceſſary, and immutable properties of the divine nature, but accidental, and arbitrary, and uncertain, and mutable; which is to ſuppoſe that God, if he pleaſed, might be otherwiſe than good, and juſt, and true. For if theſe depend merely upon the will of God, and be not neceſſary and eſſential properties of the divine nature, then the contrary of theſe, malice, and envy, and unrighteouſneſs, and falſhood do not imply any eſſential repugnancy to the divine nature; which is plainly contrary to what the ſcripture tells us, that *God cannot be tempted with evil*; that *it is impoſſible he ſhould lie*; that he *cannot be unrighteous*.

If any man ſay that God hath now declared himſelf to be juſt, and good, and faithful, and now he cannot be otherwiſe, becauſe he is a God of truth, and he changeth not; this is to grant the thing: for this ſuppoſeth the veracity and immutability of God to be eſſential and neceſſary perfections of the divine nature; and why not juſtice and goodneſs as well? I ſay, it ſuppoſeth veracity and immutability to be eſſential perfections, and not to depend upon the will of God; that is, that God cannot will to be otherwiſe than true and unchangeable: for if he could, what aſſurance can we poſſibly have, but that when he declares himſelf to be good, and juſt, he is, or may be otherwiſe?

But I need not inſiſt upon this, which ſeems to be ſo very clear, and to carry its own evidence along with it. I will only uſe this argument to prove it, and ſo leave it. No being can will its own nature, and eſſential perfections, that is, chooſe whether it will be thus, or otherwiſe; for that were to ſuppoſe it

it to be before it is, and before it hath a being, to deliberate about its own nature. Therefore, if this be the nature of God, (which, I think, no body will deny) to be good, and juſt, and true, and neceſſarily to be what he is; then goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth, do not depend upon the will of God, but there are ſuch things, ſuch notions antecedently to any act of the divine will. And this does no ways prejudice the liberty of God; for this is the higheſt perfection, to be neceſſarily good, and juſt, and true; and a liberty or poſſibility to be otherwiſe, is impotency and imperfection. For liberty no where ſpeaks perfection, but where the things and actions about which it is converſant are indifferent; in all other things it is the higheſt perfection not to be free and indifferent; but immutable and fixed, and neceſſarily bound up by the eternal laws of goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth, ſo that it ſhall not be poſſible to ſwerve from them; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, which we call his holineſs.

2. If holineſs be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, this ſhews us what account we are to make of ſin, and wickedneſs, and vice. We may judge of every privation by the habit, for they bear an exact proportion one to another. Light and darkneſs are oppoſed, as habit and privation; if light be pleaſant and comfortable, then darkneſs is diſmal and horrid. And ſo holineſs and ſin are oppoſed: If holineſs be the higheſt perfection of any nature, then ſin is the grand imperfection, and the loweſt debaſement of any being; becauſe it is the moſt oppoſite to that, and at the fartheſt diſtance from that which is the firſt excellency and perfection.

This ſhould rectify our judgment and eſteem of things and perſons. We admire and eſteem riches, and power and greatneſs; and we ſcorn and contemn poverty, and weakneſs, and meanneſs, yea, grace and holineſs, if it be in the company of theſe. We are apt to reverence and value the great, and the rich, and the mighty of this world, though they be wicked, and *to deſpiſe the poor man's wiſdom*, and ho-

holineſs; but we make a falſe judgment of things and perſons. There is nothing that can be a foundation of reſpect, that ought to command our reverence and eſteem, but real worth, and excellency, and perfection; and according to the degrees of this, we ought to beſtow our reſpect, and raiſe our eſteem. What St. James ſaith of *reſpect of perſons*, I may apply in this caſe, Jam. ii. 4. *Are ye not then partial in yourſelves, and become judges of evil thoughts?* We are extremely partial; we make a falſe judgment, and reaſon ill concerning things, when we admire gilded vices, and wickedneſs exalted to high places; I mean ungodly rich men, and ungodly great men; for wicked men are properly ungodly, unlike to God; and when we contemn poor, and mean, and afflicted holineſs and piety, were but our eyes open, and our judgment clear and unprejudiced, we ſhould ſee a beauty and reſplendency in goodneſs, even when it is under the greateſt diſadvantage, when it is cloathed with rags, and ſits upon a dung-hill, it would ſhine through all theſe miſts, and we ſhould ſee a native light and beauty in it, through the darkneſs of a poor and low condition: And we ſhould ſee wickedneſs to be a moſt vile and abject thing, when it appears in all its gallantry and bravery; we ſhould look upon the poor *righteous man, as more excellent than his neighbour*; and the profane gallant, as the *off-ſcouring of the earth*. We ſhould value a man that *does juſtice, and loves mercy, and ſpeaks the truth to his neighbour*; we ſhould eſteem any one more upon the account of any one of theſe ſimple qualities, than we ſhould another man deſtitute of theſe, upon the account of an hundred titles of honour, and ten thouſand acres of land. A wicked, unholy man, he is *a vile perſon*, who deſerves *to be contemned*; and an *holy* man, he is *the right honourable*; Pſal. xv. 4. *In whoſe eyes a vile perſon is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.* The *vile perſon* is oppoſed to him that *fears the Lord*. He that is bold to affront God, and ſin againſt him, is the baſe and ignoble perſon. God himſelf, who is poſſeſſed of all excellency and perfection

ſection, and therefore knows beſt how to judge of theſe, he tells us how we ſhould value ourſelves and others; Jer. ix. 23, 24. *Let not the wiſe man glory in his wiſdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he underſtandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exerciſe loving-kindneſs, judgement, and righteouſneſs in the earth; for in theſe things I delight, ſaith the Lord.* To know theſe divine qualities and perfections, ſignifies here, to underſtand them ſo as to imitate them. I do not ſpeak this, to bring down the value of any that are advanced in this world, or to leſſen the reſpect which is due to them; I would have nothing undervalued, but wickedneſs and vice; and I would have thoſe who have ſtore of worldly advantages to recommend them, to add religion to their riches, and holineſs to their honour, that they may be current for their intrinſick value, rather than for the image and picture of worth which the world hath ſtamped upon them.

3. If holineſs be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, then what an abſurd and unreaſonable thing is it, to ſcorn and deſpiſe holineſs, to mock and deride men under this very title! The world is much blinded, that they do not ſee the great evil of ſin, and the beauty and excellency of holineſs: but that men ſhould be ſo infatuated, as to change the nature of things, and to miſtake things of ſo vaſt difference, as ſin, and holineſs; to *call good evil, and evil good*; that ſin, which is the vileſt thing in the world, ſhould be eſteemed and cheriſhed, accounted a piece of gallantry, and reckoned amongſt the excellencies and accompliſhments of human nature; and holineſs, which is ſo great a perfection, ſhould be a name of hatred and diſgrace, to be contemned and perſecuted; that that which is the glory of heaven, and the moſt radiant perfection of the divine nature, ſhould be matter of ſcorn and contempt; as the Apoſtle ſpeaks in another caſe, *Behold, ye deſpiſers, and wonder, and periſh!* Do ye think the holy and juſt God will put up theſe affronts and in-

indignities? Ye do not only despise men, but ye despise God also. You cannot contemn that which God accounts his glory, without reviling the divine nature, and offering despite to God himself: The malice reacheth heaven, and is levelled against God, whenever ye slight holiness.

4. If God be a holy God, and hath such a repugnancy in his nature to sin, then this is matter of terror to wicked men. The holy God cannot but hate sin, and be an enemy to wickedness; and the hatred of God is terrible. We dread the hatred of a great man; because where hatred is backed with power, the effects of it are terrible: but the hatred of the almighty and eternal God, is much more dreadful; because the effects of it are greater, and more lasting, than of the hatred of a weak mortal man. We know the utmost they can do; *they can but kill the body; after that, they have no more that they can do.* They cannot hurt our souls; they cannot follow us beyond the grave, and pursue us into another world: but the effects of God's hatred and displeasure, are mighty and lasting, they extend themselves to all eternity; for *who knoweth the power of his anger?* Who can tell the utmost of what omnipotent justice can do to sinners? *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; because he that *lives for ever*, can *punish for ever.* We are miserable, if God do not love us. These words, *My soul shall have no pleasure in him*, signify great misery, and express a dreadful curse: but it is a more positive expression of misery, for God to hate us; that signifies ruin and destruction to the utmost; Psal. v. 4. *Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee.* This is a *μείωσις*, and expresseth less than is intended. God is far from being of an indifferent negative temper towards sin and wickedness; therefore the psalmist adds, *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity*; and then, in the next verse, to shew what is the effect of God's hatred, *Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing.* Therefore, sinner, fear and tremble at the thoughts of God's holiness.

5. Imitate the holineſs of God: This is the inference here in the text, *Be ye holy, for I am holy.* Holineſs, in one word, contains all the imitable perfections of God: And when it is ſaid, *Be ye holy*; it is as much as if he had ſaid, Be ye good, and patient, and merciful, and true, and faithful; for I am ſo. Therefore religion is called *the knowledge of the holy One*, Prov. ix. 10. and chap. xxx. 3. And our imitation of God is expreſſed by our *putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs*, Eph. iv. 24. Seeing then this is the chief excellency and perfection of God, and the ſum of all the perfections which we are to imitate, and wherein we are to endeavour to be like God, let us conform ourſelves to the holy God; endeavour to be habitually holy, which is our conformity to the nature of God; and actually holy, which is our conformity to the will of God. I will not enlarge upon this, becauſe I have preſſed the imitation of theſe particular perfections, goodneſs, patience, juſtice, truth, and faithfulneſs, upon other texts. I ſhall only mention two arguments, to excite and quicken our deſires and endeavour, after holineſs.

1. Holineſs is an imitation of the higheſt excellency and perfection. Holineſs, I told you, ſignifies a ſeparation from ſin and vice, and all moral imperfection, and conſequently, doth comprehend and take in all the moral perfections of the divine nature, the goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and juſtice, and veracity, and faithfulneſs of God; now theſe are the very beauty and glory of the divine nature. The firſt thing that we attribute to God, next to his being, is his goodneſs, and thoſe other attributes which have a neceſſary connexion with it; for his greatneſs and majeſty is nothing elſe but the glory which reſults from his united perfections, eſpecially from his goodneſs, and thoſe perfections which are a-kin to it. Separate from God theſe perfections which holineſs includes in it, and what would be left but an omnipotent evil, an eternal being, infinitely knowing, and infinitely able to do miſchief? Which is as plain and notorious a contradiction, and as impoſſible

a thing as can be imagined: ſo that if we have any ſparks of ambition in us, we cannot but aſpire after holineſs, which is ſo great an excellency and perfection of God himſelf. There is a vulgar prejudice againſt holineſs, as if it were a poor, mean thing, and below a great and generous ſpirit; whereas holineſs is the only true greatneſs of mind, the moſt genuine nobility, and the higheſt gallantry of ſpirit; and however it be deſpiſed by men, it is of a heavenly extraction, and divine original. Holineſs is the firſt part of the character of *the wiſdom that is from above*, Jam. iii. 17. *The wiſdom that is from above, is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocriſy.*

2. Holineſs is an eſſential and principal ingredient of happineſs. Holineſs is a ſtate of peace and tranquillity, and the very frame and temper of happineſs; and without it, the divine nature, as it would be imperfect, ſo it would be miſerable. If the divine nature were capable of envy, or malice, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or injuſtice, or unfaithfulneſs, it would be liable to vexation and diſcontent, than which nothing can be a greater diſturbance of happineſs: ſo that holineſs is neceſſary to our felicity and contentment; not only to the happineſs of the next life, but to our preſent peace and contentment. If reaſonable creatures could be happy, as brute beaſts are in their degree, by enjoying their depraved appetites, and following the dictates of ſenſe and fancy, God would not have bound us up to a law and rule, but had left us, as he hath done unreaſonable creatures, to ſatisfy our luſts and appetites, without check and controul: but angels and men, which are reaſonable creatures, have the notions of good and evil, of right and wrong, of comelineſs and filthineſs, ſo woven and twiſted into their very natures, that they can never be wholly defaced, without the ruin of their beings; and therefore it is impoſſible that ſuch creatures ſhould be happy otherwiſe, than by complying with theſe notions, and obeying the natural dictates and ſuggeſtions

ſtions of their minds; which if they neglect, and go againſt, they will naturally feel remorſe and torment in their own ſpirits; their minds will be uneaſy and unquiet, and they will be inwardly grieved and diſpleaſed with themſelves for what they have done. So the Apoſtle tells us, Rom. i. that even the moſt degenerate Heathen had conſciences, which did accuſe or excuſe them, according as they obeyed, or did contrary to the dictates of natural light. God therefore, who knows our frame, hath ſo adapted his law to us, which is the rule of holineſs, that if we live up to it, we ſhall avoid the unſpeakable torment of a guilty conſcience; whereas, if we do contrary to it, we ſhall always be at diſcord with ourſelves, and in a perpetual diſquiet of mind: for nothing can do contrary to the law of its being, that is, to its own nature, without diſpleaſure and reluctancy; the conſequence of which, in moral actions, is guilt; which is nothing elſe but the trouble and diſquiet which ariſeth in one's mind, from a conſciouſneſs of having done ſomething that contradicts the perfective principle of his being, that is, ſomething which did not become him, and which, being what he is, that is, a reaſonable creature, he ought not to do.

So that in all reaſonable creatures there is a certain kind of temper and diſpoſition that is neceſſary and eſſential to happineſs, and that is holineſs; which, as it is the perfection, ſo it is the great felicity of the divine nature: And, on the contrary, this is one chief part of the miſery of thoſe wicked, and accurſed ſpirits the devils, and of unholy men, that they are of a temper contrary to God, they are envious and malicious, and wicked; that is, of ſuch a temper as is naturally a torment and diſquiet to itſelf: And here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil diſpoſitions of our ſpirits; and till that be cured, which can only be done by holineſs, it is as impoſſible for a wicked man to be happy and contented in himſelf, as it is for a ſick man to be at eaſe; and the external preſence of God, and a local heaven, would ſignify no more to make a wicked man happy and con-

contented, than heaps of gold, and concerts of muſick, and a well ſpread table, and a rich bed, would contribute to a man's eaſe in the paroxyſms of a fever, or in a violent fit of the ſtone. If a ſenſual, or covetous, or ambitious man were in heaven, he would be like the rich man in hell, he would be tormented with a continual thirſt, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent deſires, and would not meet with the leaſt drop of ſuitable pleaſure and delight to quench and allay the heat: the reaſon is, becauſe ſuch a man hath that within him which torments him, and he cannot be at eaſe till that be removed. Sin is the violent, and unnatural, and uneaſy ſtate of our ſoul; every wicked man's ſpirit is out of order, and till the man be put into a right frame by holineſs, he will be perpetually diſquieted, and can have no reſt within himſelf. The Prophet fitly deſcribes the condition of ſuch a perſon, Iſa. lvii. 20, 21. *But the wicked are like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt forth mire and dirt: there is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.* So long as a man is unholy, ſo long as filthineſs and corruption abound in his heart, they will be reſtleſsly working, like wine which is in a perpetual motion and agitation, till it have purged itſelf of its dregs and foulneſs. Nothing is more turbulent and unquiet than the ſpirit of a wicked man; it is like the ſea, when it roars and rages through the ſtrength of contrary winds; it is the ſcene of furious luſts and wild paſſions, which as they are contrary to holineſs, ſo they maintain perpetual conteſts and feuds among themſelves.

All ſin ſeparates us from God, who is the foundation of our happineſs. Our limited nature, and the narrowneſs of our beings, will not permit us to be happy in ourſelves. It is peculiar to God to be his own happineſs: but man, becauſe he is finite, and therefore cannot be ſelf-ſufficient, is carried forth by an innate deſire of happineſs, to ſeek his felicity in God. So that there is in the nature of man a ſpring of reſtleſs motion, which, with great impatience, forceth him out of himſelf, and toſſes him to and fro.

fro, till he comes to reſt in ſomething that is ſelf-ſufficient. Our ſouls, when they are ſeparated from God, like the unclean ſpirit in the goſpel, when it was caſt out, *wander up and down in dry and deſart places, ſeeking reſt but finding none.* Were the whole world calm about a man, and did not make the leaſt attempt upon him; were he free from the fears of divine vengeance, yet he could not be ſatisfied with himſelf; there is ſomething within him that would not let him be at reſt, but would tear him from his own foundation and conſiſtency; ſo that when we are once broken off from God, the ſenſe of inward want doth ſtimulate and force us to ſeek our contentment elſewhere. So that nothing but holineſs, which reunites us to God, and reſtores our ſouls to their original and primitive ſtate, can make us happy, and give peace and reſt to our ſouls: And this is the conſtant voice and language of ſcripture, and the tenor of the Bible; *Acquaint now thyſelf with him, and be at peace,* Job xxii. 21. *Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart,* Pſal. xcvii. 11. *The work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace; and the effects of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for ever,* Iſa. xxxii. 17.

Seeing then holineſs is ſo high a perfection, and ſo great a happineſs, let theſe arguments prevail with us to aſpire after this temper, that *as he who hath called us, is holy, ſo we may be holy in all manner of converſation; becauſe it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.*

The end of the ſixth Volume.